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DANTE.

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

DANTE.

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DANTE

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS

BY

MAY ALDEN WARD



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DANTE.

CHAPTER I.

FLORENCE.

THE age that saw the birth of Italian literature was a stormy one. The never-ending conflict between the Church and the Empire was then at its height, and all Italy was ranged under one banner or the other. Borrowing names from Germany, the adherents of the Pope called themselves "Guelfs;" those of the Emperor, "Ghibellines." This long struggle had already furnished many striking historical pictures: now an emperor humbling himself as a barefooted penitent before an insolent and haughty pope; now, in turn, the same

pope besieged in the Sacred City by the same emperor, and driven forth to die in exile.

Centuries of conflict had produced no result, save that the two powers had materially weakened each other, and had raised up a third power, equally dangerous to both, — the power of the cities. The latter well knew how to use this conflict to obtain such rights and privileges as would make them eventually free communities. Some, indeed, only conquered liberty to lose it again at the hands of petty tyrants; but others held firmly to the main purpose. :

In this way one after another of the great cities obtained their freedom, as the varying fortunes of successive emperors and popes required new services in return for new privileges. In no instance was this process better illustrated than in the case of Florence. During the long struggle between the two powers she had managed to stand

aloof from either, while slowly and steadily laying the foundations of her own wealth and greatness. As her power increased she kept the reins firmly in her own hands, and held the place of a commune equally independent of Pope or Emperor.

Going back to the story of her origin, we find the old Etruscan city of Fiesole on the hill-top, which in early days had placed a few booths in the valley at the foot of the hill as a convenient place for her markets and fairs. This little "huddle of booths" was the beginning of Florence, her trade going down the Arno to Pisa. She next became a Roman colony and city; and when the time was ripe she sallied forth one day to conquer Fiesole, and brought its chief citizens to live within her own walls. From a market village she had first outgrown and then absorbed the mother city. Her commerce became important in the tenth century; and at the death of the Countess

Matilda, in 1115, the city shook off all semblance of allegiance to any count, marquis, or Imperial vicar.

One by one the unruly nobles who disturbed the peace of the Florentines from their strong castles on the surrounding hills were conquered, and instead of being banished or put to death, were forced to take up their residence within the city. This was the seed of discord which was afterward to grow into so great a tree, and bear the bitter fruit of civil war. For between these proud nobles whose only art was that of fighting, and the busy tradesmen who constituted the life of the city, there was the natural antagonism of wasps and bees. These were the real elements of which the parties of Ghibellines and Guelfs were afterward composed. But this enmity did not break out into open warfare, and Florence quietly and steadily pursued her own course, increasing her wealth and importance, until,

“in the thirteenth century, the population exceeded two hundred thousand souls, — four times the population of Rome; her buildings were unusually splendid for that day, so that many came from distant lands to see them.”

“But,” says Machiavelli, “as the diseases which attack our bodies are more dangerous and mortal in proportion as they are delayed, so Florence, though late to take part in the sects of Italy, was afterward the more afflicted by them.” The questions which were embroiling the rest of Italy were also to throw their baleful influence over this prosperous city.

The immediate cause was a family quarrel. In fact, the beginning, so far as Florence is concerned, has been traced to a banquet, where one angry man threw a plate in the face of another. Buondelmonte, a friend of the injured man, drew his sword and stabbed the thrower, whereupon the

party broke up in confusion. To reconcile the young men, and to prevent further bloodshed, the wise elders of the families resolved, after the approved Italian method, to arrange a marriage between young Buondelmonte and a niece of the man he had wounded. Buondelmonte consented; but afterward, tempted by a lady of the Donati, or, as one chronicler claims, "at the instigation of the Devil," he jilted the daughter of the Amidei for a fairer bride. The insulted lady was a relative of the Uberti, and this powerful family resolved to avenge the insult. They chose the day on which Buondelmonte was to celebrate his marriage with the Donati.

On Easter morning, in 1215, just fifty years before the birth of Dante, the conspirators waited at the foot of the Old Bridge and slew the bridegroom as he came riding across, "dressed all in white, on a white palfrey," to meet his bride. "This

death of the Buondelmonti," says an old historian, "was the beginning of the cursed parties of Guelf and Ghibelline."

The whole city was at once in an uproar; some declared for the Uberti and some for the Buondelmonti. The latter, being rather the weaker party and wishing to win the people to their side, in time identified themselves with the Guelf party, or party of the Pope, which was also the national and popular party. The Uberti and their friends adhered to the Ghibelline or Imperial party, which had always been the party of the nobles. Little cared either side for Pope or Emperor except as pegs on which to hang their own private quarrels.

Florence offered rare facilities for civil war. The nobles forced to live within the city had built themselves strong castle palaces with thick walls and high towers. Each palace was a stronghold, built of huge stones joined by a cement so solid that neither

steel nor iron could penetrate it. The door was low and narrow, the stairway narrower still; on each floor a single window, and at the corners air-holes to let in the light, or from which to watch the enemy and to hurl down missiles. At the top was a crenellated platform from which they could make war without danger. Showers of stones, darts, and arrows could be rained down through every opening on the narrow streets below. In these strongholds the nobles could gather around them their families, allies, and followers, ready for attack or defence.

At first the strife was confined to the nobility, but gradually the citizens were drawn into it. The height to which party feeling rose is beyond description; it entered into every act of private life.

The Guelfs had towers with square battlements, those of the Ghibellines were V-shaped; one party wore feathers on the

right side of the hat, the other on the left; one cut their fruit crosswise, the other lengthwise; one wore red flowers, the other white. The man who was neither a Guelf nor a Ghibelline was an object of contempt to the Florentines.

This state of affairs continued for thirty years, until the Uberti, with the aid of the Emperor Frederic II., forced the Buondelmonti and the other Guelf leaders to leave the city. The property of the vanquished was confiscated, and their houses and palaces levelled to the ground. This was the beginning of a long succession of alternate banishments and confiscations. The Guelfs, seeking foreign help, returned to inflict the same vengeance on their enemies. And so the game went on repeating itself, an occasional amnesty confirmed by marriages only serving to increase the confusion.

Half a century had not sufficed to cool this fierce party hatred. Only five years

before the birth of Dante, his "beautiful Florence" came near being blotted from the face of the earth, and was only saved by one voice.

The victory of Montaperti had placed the Ghibellines again in power, and their leaders resolved in formal assembly that the interests of the party required the total demolition of Florence. Farinata, of the Uberti, the fiercest Ghibelline of them all, was the only one to lift his voice in defence of his native city, and to him belongs the credit of saving her from destruction. Dante has immortalized this deed of Farinata's, allowing the proud old stoic to boast of it as he lies in the red-hot tomb of the heretics in the fiery city of Dis.

At the time of Dante's birth the Ghibellines were in power, and the Guelfs consequently in exile. Two years later, however, the Guelfs returned victoriously, banished their opponents, and seized the reins of

government never again to relinquish them. The Ghibellines were allowed to return a few years later, but never regained their former power and influence.

In Dante's childhood two great scenes of public reconciliation occurred between the two parties. He was eight years old when Pope Gregory X. conceived the plan of restoring harmony, and assembled the two factions for that purpose in the dry bed of the Arno, at the foot of the Ponte alle Grazie. Scaffoldings of wood were erected for the "great people," while the whole Florentine populace were present as spectators. "The Pope gave sentence in the matter between the Guelfs and Ghibellines under pain of excommunication to whomsoever would not obey it; and he made the syndics of either party kiss each other on the mouth and make peace and give bail and hostages." The peace was of short duration. The Ghibellines were within a

few days warned to leave the city, and the Pope excommunicated Florence.

In 1278, when Dante was thirteen years of age, a similar manifestation occurred. Pope Nicholas III. sent Cardinal Frangipani to Florence with a retinue of three hundred horsemen, to reconcile the two parties. This time the pageant took place in the Piazza Vecchia of Santa Maria Novella. "And there were draperies and scaffoldings and speeches and oaths and kissings all over again as before." This second reconciliation, however, was more complete: the Ghibellines returned to Florence, all decrees and condemnations against them were cancelled, and all the books of the party proscriptions and banishments in the archives of the commune were burned. For a few years "the city of Florence was in a good and happy state of repose, tranquil and at peace," says an old historian.

Meanwhile the constitution of the city had been undergoing changes corresponding to the different changes of party. From the end of the eleventh century Florence had had a form of government which placed the administration in the hands of consuls—first two, then four, then six—aided by a council of a hundred senators. In 1207, following the example of other Italian cities, Florence elected a new officer called the *podestà*, as the chief executive. The *podestà* was elected for one year, and was always chosen from another city, because being a stranger he would not be influenced by friends or relatives, and could pass more impartial judgments. The consuls were retained. Until the middle of the thirteenth century only the nobles were eligible to office, although all free citizens took part in the elections. The people now began to claim a share in the offices. The tradesmen had already

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formed themselves into guilds, of which the seven most influential were called the *arti maggiori*, or chief trades. In 1250 they undertook to reform the constitution. Instead of the podestà they elected a "captain of the people" assisted by twelve "elders," two from each district or *scstiere* of the city. The elders were chosen exclusively from the members of the guilds, were elected for one year, and were called the *signoria*.

But this new experiment was destined to a short life. After ten years the battle of Montaperti brought the Ghibellines again into power and restored the rule of the nobles. However, after the death of Manfred, the nobles, seeing the necessity of making some concessions to the people, called two podestàs, a Guelf and a Ghibelline, and appointed a commission of thirty-six citizens to revise the constitution. They intrusted the defence of the city to

the seven major guilds, each guild having its own consuls and its own banner.

When by the aid of the Pope and of Charles of Anjou the Guelfs were finally restored and the power of the Ghibellines forever broken, the constitution was again revised. Instead of the committee of thirty-six, a college of twelve consuls was placed at the head of the government, their term of office being two months. A special council called the *credenza* consisted of eighty citizens, including the representatives of the higher guilds. In addition to this they had a council of the people composed of a hundred citizens; a council of the podestà, with ninety members chosen from the nobility and the heads of the guilds; and finally a council of the commune, in which were three hundred citizens. All legal and financial matters were first laid before the council of the people for approval, then submitted to the *credenza*,

nd finally presented to the two other councils. From the first two councils all nobles and all Ghibellines were excluded. The number of men required to fill these several councils was so large in proportion to the number of citizens, and the term of office so short, that every member of the higher guilds was pretty certain to form a part of the administration sooner or later.

Not content with this complicated system, the Guelfs had a government of their own, a state within a state, having its own treasury, its own consuls, captains, and military organization. The property of the banished Ghibellines was confiscated, mobilized, and divided into three parts, — one third going into the public treasury, one third into the Guelf treasury, and the remaining third used to indemnify individual Guelfs for losses suffered in former confiscations.

From this time Florence not only remained a Guelf city, but was the head of the Guelf party in Italy. The Ghibellines never again attempted to regain control of the Republic.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND ANCESTRY.

THE biographers of Dante have advanced many theories to account for the fact that he was born in Florence, since the Guelf party, to which his family belonged, was at that time in banishment. Some have suggested that his father was either excepted from the general sentence, or had been pardoned; neither of which is probable. Others suppose his mother—Donna Bella—to have returned shortly before the birth of her child. The most plausible conjecture is, that individual Guelfs were allowed to return quietly and unnoticed to their homes before the general recall in 1267. At all events we have it from Dante's own words that he was born

in Florence. "A Florentine by birth, but not by morals," he calls himself in the letter to Can Grande; and in six of the eleven letters still in existence he speaks of himself as a Florentine. In the *Inferno* he says explicitly:—

"I was born and grew up
Upon the beautiful river Arno in the great city."¹

And in the *Paradiso*, expressing his hope of one day receiving the laurel crown in Florence, he mentions the fact that he was christened in the old Baptistery where every Florentine baby is still carried for the same purpose:—

"I will return a poet, and at the font baptismal
Will I take the laurel crown."²

Years after, Dante rescued a child from drowning in one of these same fonts, and when, in Hell, he sees wicked popes punished for simony by being planted head

¹ *Inferno*, Canto XXIII. v. 94.

² *Paradiso*, Canto XXV. v. 7.

downward in stone basins, he bethinks him that the basins are about the size of the baptismal fonts in his "beautiful St. John."

It is to be remembered that the immortal name of Dante was at first only a nickname. Our poet received at his christening the much more imposing one of *Durante di Aldighieri degli Aldighieri*. The first name, according to Florentine custom, was shortened into Dante.

The early biographers of the poet, not satisfied with the title he had made for himself, endeavored to add lustre to it by proving him to be of ancient and noble lineage. The boldest among them traced his descent from the old Roman family of the *Frangipani*. A member of this family, by the name of *Elisei*, was said to have come to Florence in the time of Julius Cæsar to oversee the building of the city, and to have taken up his residence there, giving his name to his descendants. Less

daring biographers have contented themselves with adopting the same incident, dating it only in the time of Charlemagne. "But these are very uncertain things," says Leonardo Bruni, "and in my opinion only guesses."

Dante's family can be traced with certainty only to the middle of the eleventh century. His earliest known ancestor is that Cacciaguida whom he meets in Paradise, and from whom he hears the history of his family. Cacciaguida, after being knighted for his bravery, lost his life in the Crusade under the Emperor Conrad, in 1143, and for this reason is placed by Dante in the Heaven of Mars, among those who died fighting for their faith. The wife of Cacciaguida was of the Aldighieri, and bestowed her family name upon one of her sons. The descendants of this son, "because he was a valiant and worthy man," adopted his name and called themselves

Aldighieri. Dante places this first Aldighiero on the Mount of Purgatory in the circle of the proud; and the poet must have inherited this quality in some degree, for he confesses to a certain pride and pleasure in the consciousness of his noble birth. The Aldighieri were Guelfs, and as such had been twice banished before the poet's birth, but had "learned the art of returning."

There is still some discussion concerning the year of Dante's birth, but the majority of his biographers agree in placing it in 1265. This date is confirmed by the poet's own words at the beginning of the "Divine Comedy": "Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood." The middle of our life journey, Dante tells us elsewhere, he understands to be thirty-five years, or half-way to the allotted three-score and ten. To have reached this age in the year 1300, the date assigned to his

great vision, he must have been born in 1265.

The signs and omens which usually accompany the birth of great men were not wanting in Dante's case. Boccaccio relates in all sincerity the vision of Dante's mother, who dreamed before his birth of seeing her son feeding upon the berries which fell from the laurel-tree; of seeing him grow to manhood and strive to tear the branches from the tree that fed him, and fall to the ground transformed to a peacock. "She did not at the time understand the meaning of her dream," says the old novelist; "but to us who know the sequel the meaning is plain." Another favorable omen—one to which Dante himself attached no little importance—was the position of the stars at the time of his birth. The sun was then in the constellation of the Twins, and under the influence of these stars poets, philosophers, and prophets were supposed

to enter the world. He joyfully greets this constellation in Paradise as the "glorious stars from which I acknowledge all of my genius, whatever it be."

Lightly as we may regard the influence of these stars upon the life of Dante, they have certainly been of great service in fixing the date of his birth; and it is fortunate for his biographers that he attached enough importance to the fact to mention it. It has been shown that in the year 1265 the sun was in the sign of Gemini from the 18th of May to the 17th of June. Dante's birth must therefore have fallen between these two dates, probably in the latter part of May.

In 1865 the 14th of May was celebrated in Florence as the six hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth. Karl Witte, the greatest Dante student Germany ever produced, has given much ingenious reasoning to prove that the date was the 30th of May.

The question, however, cannot be definitely decided. The home of the Aldighieri was in the very heart of the old town, in a narrow street between the two busy squares where the life of the city still throbs,—the square of the cathedral and that in which the Old Palace stands.

But to imagine Florence in Dante's day we must divest these two squares of their chief beauties. From the one we must take away the grim walls and the partisan battlements of the Old Palace, as well as the perfect arches of Orcagna's Loggia. In the other square we can leave little save the old Baptistery of which Dante speaks so lovingly, although it was then only a building of rough gray stone, without its coating of marbles, and without its "Gates of Paradise." From 1294 the walls of the cathedral were slowly rising into view, and tradition marks the spot where Dante loved to sit and watch the huge stones swung

into position. But not until two centuries later was the building crowned with the dome of Brunelleschi, nor did the eyes of the poet ever rest upon that "lily blossoming in stone" which stands by the side of it,—the bell-tower built by his friend Giotto.

CHAPTER III.

EDUCATION.

THE works of Dante abound in allusions which are of service to the biographer, and one enthusiast has undertaken to give a complete picture of the poet's life from his writings. But upon certain topics of which we would fain have information, Dante has preserved an unbroken silence. No line can be found in his works wherein reference is made to his father; and his mother is mentioned but once in the "Divine Comedy," and then in the briefest manner, although in a way which leads us to infer that her illustrious son owed to her one trait at least in his character. "Disdainful soul, blessed be the mother that bore thee!" exclaims Virgil when Dante expresses a

wish to see the arrogant Filippo Argenti dipped once more in the mire of the river Styx. Of Dante's mother we know less, if possible, than of his father; even her family name has been lost. Yet if Madonna Bella had no identity of her own, she must at least have been one of those women who are fitted to be the mothers of great men; for the training and education of her son were left to her, Dante having lost his father at a very early age.

The reliable details concerning the poet's early education are few. "Liberally trained in his boyhood," says Leonardo Aretino, "and given to preceptors of letters, he soon gave evidence of great genius and capacity for excellent things. Encouraged by his relatives and by Brunetto Latini, a worthy man for his times, he applied himself freely not only to literature but to other studies, leaving nothing undone that goes to the making of an excellent man. Nor for all

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this did he shut himself up in seclusion or withdraw himself from the world, but living and conversing with other boys of his age, was courteous, prudent, and bold in all youthful exercises."

The Brunetto Latini mentioned by Are-tino as "a worthy man for his times" was one of the most important of Dante's predecessors, and had some part in his education, as we learn from the "Divine Comedy." Born in 1220, Brunetto was esteemed in his native city as "a great philosopher and a supreme master of rhetoric." He was a prominent Guelf, and shared the banishment of his party from 1260 to 1267. During these years of exile he wrote his great work the "Trésor," a sort of encyclopædia of the wisdom of his day, and also a smaller poetical work in an allegorical dress called "Il Tesoretto" (or The Little Treasure), which has been thought, without reason, by some to have suggested to Dante

the idea of the "Divine Comedy." When the Guelfs were restored in 1267, Brunetto returned with them, and thenceforth took a prominent part in public life, filling different offices in the Republic until his death, in 1294. Dante with his usual impartiality has placed Brunetto in the Inferno for his sin, but he has erected to him there a monument of gratitude. He finds him with the Sodomites under a slow-falling, noiseless rain of fire, and with aspect so baked and blistered as to be scarcely recognizable; yet he greets him as the "dear and kind paternal image who in the world, from hour to hour, taught me how man makes himself eternal." How large a share Brunetto had in the education of Dante cannot be known; but the words "from hour to hour" lead us to think he must have given oversight and guardianship if not definite instruction.

Although we know so little of the manner of Dante's education, we may know

something of the nature of it, for education in the thirteenth century was not the complicated affair it now is, but a definite thing comprised within certain limits. The elementary studies were embraced in the seven "liberal arts" of the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*. Whoever made any claim to a common education must master the Trivium, consisting of grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric, the studies which taught the use of language. Grammar was the study of the Latin language, for the vulgar tongue was regarded as little more than a dialect, and had not yet attained the importance of a language. Dialectics, Dante pronounced to be "the smallest of all the sciences." It had become a mere mechanical strife of words, the trivial discussions of scholasticism. Rhetoric, the third branch of the Trivium, concerned itself also with the Latin instead of with a living tongue.

He who had mastered the Trivium, and desired a still higher education, turned his attention to the Quadrivium, which included arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, "the studies that lead to wisdom." The science of mathematics still busied itself with the theories of Nicomachus concerning the secret and wonderful power of certain numbers. Dante's writings show that he was not wholly free from this superstition. Astronomy figures so largely in all of his works, and especially in the "Divine Comedy," that it must be classed as one of his favorite studies. Astronomy, of course, still rested on the Ptolemaic system, which placed the earth in the centre of the universe surrounded by ten hollow spheres. In spite of this false system much progress had been made in this science, but it was still fettered by its union with astrology. Music, the fourth study of the Quadrivium,

was not an accomplishment, but a necessary part of the education. Musicians were found in every court and castle, and the poems of contemporary writers were set to music. The "Divine Comedy" abounds in passages which show a genuine love and appreciation of that art. Both Aretino and Boccaccio mention the poet's delight in songs and harmonies, and his companionship with singers and players.

Dante is thought to have studied at the universities of Bologna and Padua, and it was here probably that he pursued those subjects which he considers worthy to rank with the three highest heavens,—physics, metaphysics, and theology. Nor was he ignorant of the Fine Arts. Leonardo Aretino tells us that he could draw excellently with his own hand, and Dante has recorded the drawing of an angel on a certain tablet upon the anniversary of Beatrice's death. On account of his inti-

macy with Giotto, he has been credited with the designs of some of the latter's paintings; but this again is conjecture.

There has been much discussion as to whether the study of Greek formed a part of Dante's education, but there is little probability that he was familiar with that language. The Revival of Learning began in Italy at a later day, and Boccaccio complains half a century later that no one could be found in Tuscany who understood Greek.

But the Roman classics Dante had made his own, particularly the works of Virgil, whom he greets as his guide and teacher, "the light and honor of other poets," —

"Thou art my master, and my author thou,
Thou art alone the one from whom I took
The beautiful style that has done honour to me."¹

All biographers agree that Dante was a zealous student, mastering all that could

¹ Inferno, Canto I. v. 85.

be known in his day, "loving wisdom for its own sake," as he recommends in the *Convito*, and "minding not cold or heat, watching or fasting, or any other bodily discomfort, in the pursuit of it." "Through the study of philosophy, of theology, astrology, arithmetic and geometry, through the reading of history, through the examination of many and various books, toiling and sweating in study, he acquired the wisdom which he was to adorn and explain with his verses." ¹

¹ Leonardo Aretino.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW LIFE.

THE intimacy existing in the crowded neighborhoods of a mediæval city was such as can only be found now in the smallest villages. "To understand the private and public life of a citizen in the Middle Ages," says Balbo, "it is necessary to picture to yourself not only the little interests of the city, but also the still smaller interests of the neighborhood in which he lived." The mass of the common people of Florence lived out of doors, on the streets, in the public squares, and even in the churches, far more than in their own narrow dwellings. Every house of importance had its *loggia*, or open porch, where the principal acts of life were performed in the open air,

under the eyes of the public. In these porches the men sat absorbed in dice or chess, while the mother chatted with her neighbor across the way, and all the children of the vicinity played together in the narrow street. The festivities of any one family were for all the neighborhood.

To one of these feasts at a neighbor's house the little Dante, not quite nine years old, was taken by his father. The occasion was one always observed by the Florentines, — a May-day party to celebrate the coming in of spring. The neighbor was Folco Portinari, the father of Beatrice, and it was here that Dante first met her whose name has become so inseparable from that of her poet lover. Boccaccio, whose imagination adorns whatever it touches, has described this first meeting: —

“In that season when the sweetness of the heavens reclothes the earth with its ornaments, and makes it smile with a variety of flowers min-

gled with green leaves, it was the custom in our city for men and women to celebrate in distinct companies in their own district. And so it happened that among others Folco Portinari, a man greatly esteemed in those times by his fellow-citizens, had assembled his neighbors in his own house to celebrate on the first day of May. Among the guests was Alighieri, the poet's father; and since it was customary for children to follow their parents, especially to festive places, he was accompanied by Dante, who had not quite finished his ninth year. And here, mingling with the others of his age, of whom there were many, both boys and girls, having served the first tables, so far as his tender years allowed he began boyishly to play with the others. Among the children was a daughter of Folco, whose name was Bice,—though he always called her by her primitive name Beatrice,—who was perhaps eight years old, gay and beautiful in her childish way, gentle and pleasing in her behavior, and in words and manners more serious and modest than her tender age required. She had delicate features, well arranged, and, in addition to their beauty, full of so much modest loveliness that by many she was reputed almost an angel. Such, then, as I have described her,

and perhaps even more beautiful, she appeared at this feast before the eyes of our Dante,—not, I believe, for the first time, but first with the power to inspire love. And although he was still a child, he received her image into his heart with so much affection that from that day forth while he lived it never departed from him.”

Dante's own account of this event has given us the “*Vita Nuova*” (or New Life), the quaintest chapter of autobiography as well as the most charming love-story ever written in any tongue: “In that part of the book of my memory before the which is little that can be read, is a rubric saying, ‘Here beginneth the New Life.’” That “new life which is the old” began for Dante with this first meeting at the May party given by the father of Beatrice.

Dante, however, makes no mention of the details of time or place except to state that he was near the end of his ninth year and she at the beginning of hers; but he de-

scribes minutely the effect upon himself of this first meeting, "when mine eyes first beheld the glorious mistress of my heart, who was called Beatrice — Blessed — by many who knew not why she was so called. She appeared to me clad in a most noble color, a modest and becoming crimson, girded and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. At that moment, I say most truly that the spirit of life which hath its dwellings in the secretest chambers of the heart began to tremble with such violence that the least pulses of my body shook therewith, and, trembling, it said these words: 'Behold a god stronger than I, who coming shall rule over me!' . . . From that time forward," says the poet, "Love lorded it over my soul. . . . He commanded me ofttimes that I should seek to see this youthful angel, so that I in my boyhood often went seeking her, and saw her of such noble and praiseworthy

deportment, that truly of her might be said those words of the poet Homer, 'She seemed not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God.'"

The second incident of the New Life occurs in the poet's eighteenth year. Exactly nine years after the first appearance of this most gracious lady he beholds her again, dressed all in pure white, walking between two gentle ladies older than herself. "And passing along a street she turned her eyes toward that part where I stood in great timidity, and through her ineffable courtesy, which is rewarded in the eternal world, saluted me with such virtue that I seemed then and there to behold all the limits of blessedness. The hour when her most sweet salutation reached me was exactly the ninth of that day, and because it was the first time that her words had reached my ears, I took in such sweetness that I departed from the

crowd like one intoxicated." Betaking himself to the loneliness of his own room, he falls into a pleasant slumber and beholds a marvellous vision wherein Love seems to be holding Beatrice in his arms and feeding her with her lover's burning heart.

This vision Dante made into a sonnet, "having already seen in myself," he says, "the art of speaking in rhyme." The sonnet was sent, according to the custom of the times, to all the poets of Florence, with a request for an explanation of the vision. Some of the sonnets written in reply have come down to us,—one from Dante da Majano, disdainfully advising the youthful poet to put himself under the care of a physician, to prevent such troubled dreams. Another is from Guido Cavalcanti, beginning:—

"Thou seemest to me to have seen all worth."

This Guido, whom Dante calls thereafter his "first friend," was himself a poet of

note as well as a philosopher. "And this was the beginning of the friendship between us," says Dante, "when he knew it was I who had sent him the sonnet."

The friendship thus formed was never broken, and it was for this first friend that Dante wrote many of the sonnets which with their accompanying explanations were afterward gathered into the little book called the "*Vita Nuova*" (or *New Life*). Therein he relates that after this first vision of love his natural spirit began to be impeded in its workings because his mind was wholly given up to thoughts of this gentle lady; that he became so frail and weak that his friends were disturbed to know the cause. He relates how, to conceal the real object of his affection, he feigned love for first one and then another lady; how he made this screen so effectual that ugly rumors arose, and Beatrice, who was the destroyer of all evil and the

queen of all good, refused him her salutation; how, being deprived of this salutation, he bathed the earth with his tears and sobbed himself to sleep like a whipped child, for in this salutation lay all his happiness. "I say that when she appeared in any place, through the hope of her wonderful salutation no enemy remained to me; a flame of charity seized me that made me pardon any one who had done me an injury; and if any one had questioned me of anything, my answer would have been only 'Love,' with a countenance clothed with humility." Denied this salutation, he resolves to find his happiness thenceforth only in the words which praise his lady.

Falling ill, he is reminded by his sufferings of the brevity and uncertainty of life, but instead of dreading his own death he is tormented only by the thought that the lovely Beatrice must of necessity some

time die. Not a word is said of her marriage to Messer Simone de Bardi and his own consequent disappointment, although it is now known that she was married as early as 1287. He relates how Beatrice with other ladies mocked his embarrassment and how he departed from their presence and returned to the "chamber of tears." Yet even in this agony and humiliation he finds matter for poetry and makes a sonnet thereon.

But this dream world, peopled only with gentle ladies and poet lovers, is suddenly shaken to its foundations. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become as a widow, she that was great among nations!" exclaims Dante, breaking off in the midst of a poem. "I was designing the above canzone, and had completed only the above written stanza, when the Lord of Justice called this most gentle lady to glory." Little is said of her

death save to describe his own sorrowful condition "left weeping in this desolate city." "When mine eyes had wept for some time and had become so weary that I could no longer through them give vent to my sorrow, I thought to give it vent through some sorrowful words." And so he returned to his sonnets.

After a time he was near being consoled by the compassion of a beautiful lady who gazed upon him from a window with a gaze full of pity. Standing in a place where he was reminded of the past he was overcome by his sorrow. Recollecting himself, he raised his eyes to see if any one had seen him, and he saw a lady, young and very beautiful, who was watching him from a window with much compassion in her countenance. Since the unhappy when they see the sympathy of others are more easily moved to tears, as if pitying themselves, he felt his eyes

begin to overflow, and he departed from her sight. But it happened that whenever he saw the lady she showed so great sympathy that when he was unable to give vent to his sorrow he was led to go in search of her who seemed to draw the tears from his eyes; and he saw her so often that his eyes began to delight too much in her, and he was tempted to think she was sent to console him for his lost love.

But after some inward battles he rejected this thought, his heart returned, humbled and ashamed, to the memory of Beatrice, and his weeping so increased that his eyes were surrounded with purple rings "as if they had suffered martyrdom." "In tears of grief and sighs of agony I wear my heart out when I am alone, so that if any one saw me they must grieve; and what my life has been since my lady went to the *new age* no living tongue can tell." Finally, he

tells us, it was given him to behold a wonderful vision, "wherein I saw things which made me resolve to say no more of this blessed one until I could treat of her more worthily. And to this end I study all I can, as she truly knoweth. So that if it shall please Him through whom all things live, that my life be preserved for some years, I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman. And then, may it please Him who is the Lord of Grace, that my soul may go to behold the glory of its lady, namely, of that blessed Beatrice who look-eth in glory upon the face of Him who is through all ages blessed." These words seem to imply that he had already conceived the idea of his divine poem.

Many scholars have believed and labored to prove that the "New Life" is an allegory, and Beatrice only a creation of the poet's fancy. Idealized she may be and certainly is in the *Convito* and the "Divine Comedy ;"

but who that reads the "New Life" can refuse to believe in a real Beatrice of flesh and blood, walking through the streets of Florence, "crowned and clothed with humility," yet so lovely that "when she passed along the way, all the people ran to behold her."

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE.

IT is to be borne in mind that the life of Dante at this time was a dual life. The dreamy youth, who seemed to be occupied with nothing but sonnets and canzoni, and to be wholly given up to sighs and tears, was leading at the same time another life, —an outside life,—taking an active interest in the affairs of the Republic, and mingling daily with the men who afterward helped to people his *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. A year before the death of Beatrice he was present —“not a child in arms”—at the battle of Campaldino, when Florence, as the head of the Guelf faction in Tuscany, set out to chastise her Ghibelline neighbor, Arezzo. It was customary to place in front of the army

a company of horsemen called "wounders," or attackers, to begin the battle. Dante was found "fighting bravely in the front rank, the post of greatest danger." He confesses to have felt at first much fear but afterward great delight in the different occurrences of the battle, where the Ghibellines were utterly defeated and routed. He also took part in another expedition against the Ghibellines, — the siege of the castle of Caprona. "And I would," says Leonardo Aretino, "that our Boccaccio had made mention of this virtue instead of the love of nine years and such like trivialities, which he relates of so great a man. But the tongue will go where the tooth aches, and he that loves to drink is always talking of wine."

Boccaccio prefers to employ his eloquence in describing Dante's sorrowful condition after the death of Beatrice. "He remained in such sorrow, in such affliction, in such tears, that many of his relatives and friends

thought there could be no end save death. And that, they thought, would be soon, seeing him give heed to no comfort, to no consolation offered him. Days and nights were alike; none passed without sobs, without sighs and copious floods of tears, and his eyes seemed to be two abundant fountains of running water, so that many marvelled whence he could find tears enough to suffice for such weeping."

The *Vita Nuova* was not completed until some time after Beatrice's death, since he speaks of drawing an angel and writing a sonnet on the anniversary of that sad event. Boccaccio says that it was written soon after, "when his tears were not yet dry." Internal evidence seems to prove that it was completed at a much later date. Recording in this little book his love, his disappointments, temptations, and overwhelming sorrow may have helped for a time to assuage his grief. Afterward, we learn from

the Convito, he sought consolation in study. "When the first delight of my soul was taken from me, — namely, Beatrice, — I remained in such sadness that no comfort availed me. However, after some time my spirit, which sought healing, thought to enter the path where another afflicted one had found help; and I began to read that little known book of Boethius, in which he, captive and exiled, had consoled himself. And when I heard besides that Tullius had written another book wherein, treating of friendship, he had spoken words of consolation for Lælius on the death of his friend Scipio, I set myself to read that. And although at first it was hard for me to enter into their meaning, yet at last I penetrated it so far as my knowledge of language and my talent permitted, — through which talent I had already known many things as if in a dream, as may be seen in the Vita Nuova."

So zealously did Dante devote himself to

study that his sight was injured, and the stars appeared "shadowed with a white blur." All this however, according to Boccaccio, did not suffice. "Through weeping, through the affliction that he felt within his heart, and through taking no care of himself, he had become almost a savage thing to look upon, — lean, bearded, wholly transformed from what he had been before; insomuch that his aspect roused compassion not only in his friends, but in every one who saw him. This compassion and a dread of worse made his relatives attentive to his comfort; who, when they saw his tears somewhat ceased and knew that his burning sighs had given some rest to his weary breast, began again to solicit him with consolations long thrown away. And although he had until then kept his ears closed, he began not only to open them, but to listen willingly to what was said for his comfort. Seeing which, his relatives, that they might not only draw him

from his grief but restore him to joy, resolved to give him a wife; that as the lost lady had been the cause of his sorrow, the newly acquired might bring happiness. And having found a young lady suited to his condition, they discovered their intentions to him, with the reasons that appeared most convincing. And, not to go into all the details, after long persuasion and without too much time elapsing, the effect followed the reasoning, and they were married."

A sorry measure this, thinks the old biographer, who deemed marriage incompatible with a life of study. "Let philosophers," he exclaims, "leave marriage to rich fools and to noblemen and laborers, and let them content themselves with Philosophy, who is a far fairer bride than any other." Half a century later Aretino gravely rebukes him, and begs him to remember that "Socrates, the most noble philosopher that ever was, had a wife and children, and offices in

the republic of his city ; and Aristotle, than whom none could have more wisdom and learning, had two wives, at different times, and had children and wealth."

Dante's marriage occurred in 1292, in his twenty-seventh year. His wife, Gemma, belonged to the powerful family of the Donati, although not, as was once thought, a sister of the haughty Corso. Since the houses of the Alighieri were near to those of the Donati, many have wished to make Gemma identical with the compassionate lady who gazed upon the poet with pitying eyes after his great loss. Dante himself seems to repent of having attached so much importance to the lady of the window, and to wish to make of that second love an allegory, a symbol of Philosophy, "whose sweetness he tasted so fully that the love of her banished every other thought." It is probable that this gentle lady, "young and very beautiful," was, like Beatrice, a woman first, an

allegory afterward. In the *Vita Nuova* Dante has spoken of her in terms which can scarcely be applied to a merely symbolical creature, to "the daughter of God, queen of all, most noble and beautiful Philosophy;" but to make her identical with the poet's wife is mere conjecture.

In fact, all that has been said of poor Gemma, whether in praise or blame, is purely gratuitous, since not enough is known of her life to form a basis for an opinion. Boccaccio has been much censured for giving her a bad name; yet, carefully examined, his invectives are found to be directed against the sex at large rather than against Gemma in particular. After enumerating the evils and miseries that may follow in the train of matrimony, he adds expressly: "Certainly I do not affirm these things to have happened to Dante, *for I do not know*. Things like these or others *may* have been the reason that, once parted from her, he would

neither go where she was nor suffer her to come to him, although they had many children." This last statement has little weight. Dante could not well return to his wife after his banishment, being under sentence of death if found within the confines of Florence; nor could she easily follow the fortunes of her husband, a homeless exile dependent on the charity of others. Dante, moreover, was living constantly in the hope of returning to Florence instead of forming plans for the establishment of a home elsewhere. Boccaccio himself commends the prudence of Gemma in caring for her little flock after her husband's banishment.

Manetti, a wholly untrustworthy biographer, is responsible for representing the wife of Dante as a modern Xantippe. Recent biographers lean perhaps too far to the other side, and in order to vindicate Gemma lay all the blame of an unhappy

marriage upon Dante. Certainly it is not every one who can live happily with a Dante.

There is a widespread impression that the marriage was not altogether a fortunate one. The wife's family was wealthier, more powerful, and of higher rank than Dante's. The Donati and the Alighieri belonged to opposite political parties. Corso Donati, the head of his family, was not only the leader of the hostile faction, but was also a bitter personal enemy of Dante's "first friend," Guido Cavalcanti. These facts may have contributed to make the marriage other than a happy one. Yet a brother and a sister of this same Corso were numbered among Dante's intimate friends. Forese Donati, expiating in Purgatory the sin of gluttony, addresses Dante as "brother," and the poet refers to their former life together. Of the gentle Piccarda, ruthlessly torn from her convent by her brother Corso and forced

to marry against her will, Dante speaks with warm affection. Some commentators find a reproach for Gemma in the passage which tells how long endures the love of woman "when not rekindled by the eye or touch." It is pleasanter to believe that the poet had his wife and children in mind when he placed in the mouth of Cacciaguida that memorable prophecy of his banishment: "Thou shalt leave everything beloved most dearly; and this is the arrow which the bow of exile first shoots forth."

Notwithstanding the lack of data, the question "Was Gemma Donati a good wife, and was the marriage a happy one?" has been widely discussed in learned reviews and Dante year-books. The late Professor Witte, the acknowledged authority in Germany in Dantesque studies, after carefully weighing all that has been said on both sides of this vexed question, gives the following summing up:—

"What can we give, if not with certainty, at least with probability, as the result of this long research?

"1. That in the marriage of Dante with Gemma, not founded on love, love, or at least genuine love, did not supervene.

"2. That with the lapse of years in this relation, conjugal affection may have been somewhat chilled, more perhaps on the part of the husband than of the wife.

"3. That Gemma was not the woman to rightly value the loftiness of Dante's genius.

"4. That from a point of view restricted to domestic cares, to which Gemma was obliged to devote herself, especially after the departure of her husband, her complaints were not without some excuse.

"5. That the poet perhaps considered the manners of his wife too free, but of that we have no certainty, and still less whether he attributed to her other special crimes, and what they might be.

"6. That if the ways of Gemma, as may be supposed, were little congenial to Dante during the ten years that they lived together, the reports, perhaps exaggerated, of her mode of life after their separation would foment that alienation of heart."¹

¹ Witte, Dante Forschungen.

The children of this marriage were thought until recently to be seven. That number is now disputed. Witte thinks we can only speak with certainty of four. Among these was a daughter who bore the name of that blessed Beatrice "who lived in heaven with the angels, and on earth in the soul of Dante."

CHAPTER VI.

GROWTH OF FLORENCE.

“THE care of a family,” says Boccaccio, “drew Dante to that of the Republic, in which the vain honors attached to public office so enwrapped him, that without noting whence he came or whither he went, he gave himself up wholly to the government of the same.” The biographers of Dante unite in warning us that the words of Boccaccio are always to be taken with a grain of salt; and it is true that his account seems somewhat highly colored when he states that “no embassy was heard or answered, no law reformed or abrogated, no peace concluded or war declared,—in short no question of any weight decided, without his advice.” Yet the grave Leo-

nardo Aretino, whose veracity no one has questioned, tells us that Dante was "much employed in the service of the Republic." Certainly a man with the strong convictions of Dante could not remain a silent spectator of the stormy and troubled events which were agitating Florence in the latter part of the thirteenth century.

To understand the political life of the poet it is necessary to note the changes that had taken place in the Republic during the years of his youth. The tradesmen had long since organized themselves into guilds or "arts," and these guilds constantly growing in wealth and importance added much to the prosperity of the city. The seven most wealthy and influential were called the seven "major arts."¹ Their

¹ These were: 1. Judges and notaries. 2. *Calimala*, or merchants of foreign wools. These foreign cloths were brought from all parts of the world to receive a finish which doubled their value, and which was a secret with the Florentines. 3. Bankers and money changers. This was also

members were known in the vulgar tongue as the *popolo grasso*, or "fat people," in distinction from the poorer class, the *popolo minuto*, or "thin people." These "fat people" as their wealth increased began to thirst for power, and to grow restless under the dominion of the nobles.

In 1282 the trades decided to take the reins of government into their own hands. The board of fourteen notables, established after the last public reconciliation in 1280, was replaced by a board of three, chosen from the heads of the guilds. The board was soon increased to six, one, for each *settiere*, or sixth of the city, and from each guild except that of judges and notaries. This exception was a just one, since the guild of lawyers filled many other offices in the government. The nobles were not

an influential guild, the Florentines being bankers for all civilized Europe. 4. Wool merchants. 5. Silk merchants. 6. Druggists and physicians. 7. Furriers.

wholly excluded from office, but were only made eligible by registering in one of the guilds. They were not actually required to practise the trade or profession in which they were inscribed, but might retain the privilege of idleness "as a sign and seal of their native superiority." The requirement was merely a formal one intended to humble the pride of the nobles and make the name of citizen more honorable than that of gentleman. The board of six were called "Priors of the Arts." Their duties were "the administration of the government, the care that all should receive justice, and that the little and weak should not be oppressed by the great and mighty." The Priors were required to live together at the cost of the State, to sleep in the same room and eat at the same table, the idea being to protect them from injury as well as from outside influence, and to promote harmony among themselves. They were not per-

mitted, either by day or night, to leave the building where their sittings were held, or to speak to any one except on public business, and that in the presence of two thirds of their number. Fortunately this life of seclusion was short, the term of office being limited to two months, thus giving six changes of administration in the course of a year. The podestà and the captain of the people, both chosen from a remote city, were retained with their separate councils.

Notwithstanding all these precautions the ever-present jealousy between the nobility and the people was constantly causing trouble. "For when the people want to live according to law and the nobles want to override the law, they cannot possibly harmonize," says the sagacious Machiavelli. The nobles eclipsed the merchants in fighting, and their success in the wars with Pisa and Arezzo increased their prestige and their boldness. After the battle of Campaldino

they became more insolent and haughty than ever. They despised a government whose honors were only obtainable at the cost of entering one of the guilds, and they avenged this public wrong by privately oppressing and insulting the helpless. Scarcely a day passed that some one of the people was not injured by a noble, and without redress, for it was a bold act to accuse a noble, and still bolder to testify against him.

This state of affairs brought about another uprising of the people. In 1292, led by Giano della Bella, they made still greater reforms in the government, and secured stringent laws to restrain the insolence of the nobility. A new officer, called the *gonfalonier*, or "standard-bearer of justice," was appointed, with a thousand armed men at his command, to execute these laws. In the new laws, called the "ordinances of justice," the severest penalties were pro-

vided for every injury inflicted by a nobleman on a citizen. For a simple wound the offender was fined two thousand lire, and in default of payment within ten days, sentenced to lose a hand or a foot. If a citizen were killed or badly wounded, the podestà, with the gonfalonier and his armed men, were to proceed at once to the home of the offender and destroy and lay waste his houses and possessions "utterly from the foundations and from the roots of them." All nobles were excluded from the government. This disqualification applied not only to the "great nobles," but to the lesser nobility, including all who numbered a knight among their ancestry. For those, however, "who were neither tyrants nor very powerful" a loophole of escape remained. They could still purchase the rights of citizenship by renouncing their nobility and inscribing themselves in one of the trades. Many availed themselves of this privilege, and

"leaving the ranks of the nobles went over to those of the people." Nobility indeed was at such a discount that citizens who disturbed the public peace were *ennobled* as a *punishment* for their crimes.

In the hope of putting an end to this reign of terror the nobles plotted against Giano della Bella, and in 1295 succeeded in driving him from the city. But his overthrow and banishment failed to produce the desired result. The ordinances of justice remained in force with but little modification. The government had become irrevocably democratic. The years that followed were peaceful and prosperous ones for Florence. "Never was our city in a more flourishing state than at this epoch," the old historians unite in saying. "Full of people, riches, and reputation, all Tuscany as friends or subjects obeyed her, — thirty thousand citizens capable of bearing arms, with seventy thousand more in the territory

around. And although anger and suspicion separated the nobles and the people, their effects were slight, and the great body of the inhabitants lived in peace and unity."

Having effectually quelled the nobles, and being free from war within and without the walls, the people had time to turn their attention to beautifying the city. They were fond of displaying their wealth,—these wealthy tradesmen,—and of making the name of a Florentine merchant respected throughout the world. They vied with each other in erecting magnificent palaces and in contributing to public buildings. In the last seven years of the thirteenth century many of those monuments were begun which still form the wonder and the glory of the city. The foundations of Santa Croce, the Pantheon of Florence, where rest the bones of Michael Angelo and Galileo, were laid in 1294. In the same year, "the city of Florence being in a tranquil

and happy condition, the fortunes of the people being improved through the innovations of Giano della Bella," they decided to enlarge the church of Santa Reparata. Later it was decided to rebuild it, and the name was changed to St. Mary of the Flower. It was founded in 1296, with great solemnity, "the pope's legate, cardinals, and many bishops being present, together with the podestà, the captain of the people, and all the orders of the Signory." It is still the largest and most beautiful church in Florence. So pleased were the people with the beginnings of the structure that they showed their gratitude to Arnolfo, the architect, by declaring him in 1300 exempt from taxes for the rest of his life. In 1298 Arnolfo planned and commenced the Palace of the Priors,—the stern old pile now known as the Palazzo Vecchio, for so many centuries the seat of government for the commune. In these years the churches of

Santa Maria Novella and of Santa Spirito were begun, and immense sums were expended on a new and third circle of walls around the city. In these years, too, the old historians have much to say of the public rejoicings in Florence,—of “bands of youths and maidens in new clothes, dancing through the streets with musical instruments, and with garlands of flowers on their heads, passing their time in play and merriment and dinners and suppers.”

The testimony of the historians is unanimous upon another point. “In consequence of the leisure resulting from this tranquillity, literature was then in a very flourishing condition,—so that the age produced many men of high excellence; and art began to arise at the same time, having been, as it were, dragged forth from its lurking-place amid the dimmest darkness.” Dante enjoyed the friendship of many of these men of high excellence in literature and art.

He was on intimate terms with the most distinguished poets of his time, above all with Guido Cavalcanti, "the second eye of Italian literature." So great was his intimacy with this poet that the elder Cavalcanti, in the city of Dis with the heretics, is astonished that Dante should be making his sad pilgrimage without Guido.

In art, "dragged forth from its hiding-place," Cimabue was delighting his fellow-citizens with his departure from the Byzantine methods, and the merry Florentine populace were testifying their gratitude by festivals and processions. They could think of no better way to entertain a princely visitor than to conduct him in state to the painter's studio to see and admire an unfinished painting. They also honored the artist by carrying his "Madonna" through the streets in joyful procession to the church it was to adorn. The generous Cimabue had already brought to Florence

the shepherd boy of Vespignano whom he had found drawing on stones and sand, and whose fame was soon to eclipse that of his master. This young artist was numbered among the friends of Dante, and to him is attributed the portrait of the poet, on the wall of the Chapel of the Podestà, so wonderfully recovered in 1840. Whether painted by Giotto or another, the face is the face of Dante as we love to imagine it in the early years of manhood, before sorrow and bitterness had set their seal upon it and given it that sternness which accords so well with his dread vision.

CHAPTER VII.

PUBLIC LIFE.

UNDER the new order of things, to be a citizen of Florence,—that is, to be eligible to any office, to take part in any of the numerous councils of the commune, or to exercise any political rights whatever,—four qualifications were requisite: (1) To be enrolled in one of the major guilds; (2) To pay the taxes; (3) To be a Guelf; (4) To be not less than thirty years of age. Dante, who “numbered a knight among his ancestors,” was one of those who went through the form of registering in some guild to avoid disfranchisement. In the register of Physicians and Apothecaries is found the entry, “Dante d’Aldighiero degli Aldighieri, Florentine Poet.”

In what year Dante was matriculated in this guild is not definitely known, but it was probably about 1295, when he had reached the age required for admission to citizenship. In this year and the following one he was a member of some of the many councils that went to make up this complicated form of government. Filelfo, a biographer of no weight, credits him with fourteen embassies for the commune; but there is definite information of only one. In 1299 he was sent as the ambassador of the Republic to the commune of San Gemignano in the interests of the Guelf party.

In 1300 Dante, having reached the age of thirty-five, was chosen for the highest position to which a citizen of Florence could aspire. He became one of the six priors,—not chosen by lot as at a later day, but by election,—his term of office extending from the 15th of June to the 15th of August.

The moment when Dante and his colleagues entered upon their new duties was a critical one, Florence having exchanged the peace and tranquillity of the last few years for her usual condition of turbulence. The calm had been a forced one, for the old elements of discord were always present,—the suspicion and hatred between the nobles and the people. “The fires though buried were not extinct,” but were always smouldering, ready at the first opportunity to break out afresh. The immediate occasion of the new outbreak was the rivalry of two powerful neighboring families,—the Cerchi and the Donati.

The Donati were nobles of ancient lineage, with little wealth, but with sufficient pride and arrogance to get themselves well hated, and to obtain from popular malice the nickname of *malefammi*, — “evil-doers.” The head of the family was Corso Donati, a haughty nobleman who for his excessive

pride was called "the Baron." "As he rode through the streets of the city the people saluted him with cries of 'Long live the Baron!' And he had a look as if he owned the land." He was not only the representative of his family, but also the leader of the factious nobility, and had been instrumental in procuring the downfall of Giano della Bella. Daring, eloquent, and impetuous, Corso was well fitted to be the leader of a party.

The other family, the Cerchi, were wealthy merchants, managing one of the largest commercial houses in the world. Their leader, Vieri di Cerchi, lacked the bold and brilliant qualities of his rival, but was far more popular on account of his amiability and generosity. The Cerchi had bought the palace of an old Ghibelline family near the houses of the Donati, and having enlarged and embellished it, lived there in great splendor.

The jealousy and ill-will between the two families increased, the Cerchi hating the

Donati for their ancient lineage as well as for their pride and arrogance, while the Donati hated the Cerchi for the wealth and luxury which they could not emulate. Both families had their adherents and followers, and quarrels were frequent between them. A misunderstanding at a funeral sufficed to bring on an affray which would have ended in a serious battle but for the interference of other citizens.

While things were in this inflammable state a quarrel was imported from Pistoja to add zest and vigor to the feud already existing. This neighboring city was more embroiled than Florence. The powerful and numerous family of the Cancellieri was divided into two hostile factions, both descended from a certain notary who had been twice married. One wife had borne the name of Bianca, and her descendants called themselves *Bianchi*, or "whites;" and in distinction, the descendants of the other

wife took the name of *Neri*, or "blacks." The two branches of the family lived in open enmity with each other.

In one of their many quarrels a White—Geri di Bertacci—was wounded by a Black, Lore di Guglielmo. The father of Lore, being of a peace-loving disposition, sent his son to beg pardon of the wounded man's father. Instead of granting it, Bertacci bade his servant take the youth to a horse-block and cut off his hand; then sent him to his father with the message that injuries are not washed away with words but with blood. Guglielmo and the other Blacks were indignant, and thirsted for revenge. Other families taking sides, the whole city of Pistoja became involved in the quarrel which had grown from a family feud to a destructive civil war. Alarmed at the state of affairs, the more moderate citizens begged Florence to interfere and restore order, offering her the government of the

city for five years. The Republic accepted the charge, and began by ordering the chiefs of both factions to Florence, "taking the firebrand from her neighbor's house to set fire to her own." Pistoja was only twenty miles from Florence, and both Whites and Blacks found friends and relatives in their new home, the former being received and sheltered by the Cerchi, the latter by the Donati and their allies. Florence like Pistoja was soon divided into Whites and Blacks, the one party falling naturally under the lead of the Cerchi, the other of the Donati. The parties were already in existence, needing only new names for a rallying cry. "Very soon there was neither male nor female, great nor small, noble, popolano, nor plebeian, priest nor friar, who was not on one side or the other of this unhappy quarrel."

The first blood was shed on the 1st of May in the year 1300. Florence was cele-

brating in the usual fashion the return of spring. On the square in front of the church of Santa Trinità a number of ladies were dancing, and a group of mounted knights belonging to the Cerchi sat looking on, when a party of riders of the Donati faction approached, and either purposely or through carelessness jostled the Cerchi. A tumult arose, swords were drawn, many were wounded, and one of the Cerchi lost his nose in the fray. The whole city was in an uproar; the shops were closed and all the citizens rushed to arms.

Old party lines were strangely confused. On the side of the Cerchi were the minor trades, not yet admitted to a share in the government, and the remnants of the old Ghibelline nobility. They had obtained the good-will of the former by their liberality, their support of Giano della Bella, and their willingness to extend political rights, while they had at the same time won the favor

of the Ghibellines by their moderation and their reluctance to persecute. The powerful Guelf nobles sided with the Donati; while the "fat people" — the rich citizens — were divided between the two parties.

The Blacks were the extreme and radical Guelfs, the Whites the moderate. To the party of moderation, the party most disposed to peace and order, Dante belonged, although he had married into the family of the Donati. To make party capital, the Blacks accused the Whites of leaning toward Ghibellinism, and appealed to the Pope to interfere in their favor. Boniface VIII. sent as an "angel of peace," the Cardinal Acquasparta, who arrived in the middle of June, when Dante and his colleagues were just entering their priorate. The cardinal demanded full power to reform the city and to restore order; but the new priors, fearing his partiality to the Blacks, refused it. The "angel of peace" departed in wrath,

leaving a sentence of excommunication behind him. The priors now saw themselves compelled to take some decisive step, and to preserve an appearance of strict impartiality resolved upon the new and unheard-of measure of banishing the hot-heads of both parties, sending Corso Donati and other turbulent Blacks to Castello della Pieve, and ordering to Serrezano many prominent men of the White party, among them Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's dearest friend. The Whites returned sooner than the Blacks, and Dante was accused of partiality; but the charge had no foundation, for at the time of their recall he was no longer in office. They were permitted to return on account of the illness of Guido Cavalcanti, who was injured by the unwholesome air of Serrezano, and died soon after his recall.

What share of the responsibility was Dante's in the two important steps of re-

fusing the mediation of the Papal legate and banishing the leaders of both parties, cannot be known. Leonardo Aretino asserts that the priors acted upon the advice of Dante, and from the hatred with which he was afterward pursued by the Blacks, the statement seems probable.

On the 15th of August the two anxious and eventful months of Dante's priorate came to an end. He was right in attributing his exile and the sufferings of his later years to this brief period of power. "All my evils and all my misfortunes," he says, "had their origin and beginning in this unhappy term of my priorate; of which priorate although through prudence I was not worthy, yet through age and loyalty I was not unworthy."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXILE.

NEITHER the banishment of the factious leaders nor their return brought peace to Florence. The Whites were soon recalled on the pretext that the air of Serrezano was unhealthy, and a few months later the Blacks were allowed to return, with the exception of Corso Donati, who was sentenced to death, and his estates confiscated. Corso had in the mean time broken his ban and betaken himself to Rome, where he had obtained the private ear of the Pope, accusing the Whites of leaning toward Ghibellinism and begging Boniface to interfere in favor of the party which had remained faithful to the Holy Church.

The Blacks in a secret assembly held in the church of Santa Trinità had resolved to send another embassy to the Pope, asking him, since the peaceful mediation of Cardinal Acquasparta had failed, to interfere in a more decisive manner. They sought to avail themselves of that fatal expedient so often tried in Florence,—the intervention of foreign troops,—and they begged the Pope to send them a prince of the House of France “to pacify the city;” that is, to take the power from the Whites and give it to the Blacks. The prince to whom their thoughts turned was Charles of Valois, brother of Philip the Fair, King of France.

The Pope lent a willing ear to their request, for he beheld with alarm the preponderance of the Whites, who at most were but lukewarm, moderate Guelfs, strongly suspected of inclining too favorably toward the imperial party. He had already

invited Charles into Italy for the avowed purpose of reconquering Sicily for the King of Naples.

Charles of Valois, known as "Charles Lackland," from his having no kingdom of his own and his desire to acquire one, was a bold, ambitious, and unscrupulous prince, a fitting instrument to carry out the Pope's design of "restoring order" in Florence. In September, 1301, he was appointed "field commander, defender of the Church, and pacificator of Tuscany."

The Whites failed to realize the danger threatening them, until Charles with his French knights had actually begun his march toward Florence. In alarm, they hastily resolved to send an embassy to the Pope, with the hope of persuading him to recall the French prince, or at least to arrange that he should come with a friendly meaning toward their party. "And when they came to deliberate who should be the

head of the embassy," says Boccaccio, "it was proposed by all that it should be Dante. When he heard this, Dante, almost beside himself, exclaimed, 'If I go, who will stay? And if I stay, who will go?' as if he alone were the man of worth among them who gave weight to the others." This incident rests on no authority save the mere assertion of Boccaccio. If true, it only serves to show Dante's intense anxiety for the welfare of his native city at this crisis rather than an overweening sense of his own importance.

An ambassador more pleasing to the Pope might surely have been selected; for Dante had not only been one of the priors who rejected the mediation of the Papal legate, but he had also persistently opposed every demand for men or money made by the Holy See. Twice in the council of a hundred he had openly advised that "nothing be done in the service of the Pope."

Nevertheless Dante was chosen for the embassy, and with the three other ambassadors set out for Rome in September, 1301, little dreaming that he was taking his last look at his native city.

If we deny the authenticity of Dino Compagni, we have no account of Dante's audience with the Pope; but historians have delighted in sketching the interview: "The poet philosopher in his Florentine lucco, — the long and graceful robe which the pictures of him have made familiar to our eyes, — kneeling before the Pontiff's footstool with upturned look, while every feature of that wonderfully expressive and strongly-marked face was working with intense anxiety and passion." On the other hand, "Boniface with his hard, worldly face, sardonic nose, sensual mouth, double chin, and cold, shrewd eye." Dante has neglected no opportunity of showing his contempt for Boniface. He has immortalized

his enemy by the scorn with which he pursues him from the depths of Hell to the heights of Paradise. In the *Inferno* he assigns him his place among the simoniacs, who are planted head downward in stone pits, with only the soles of their feet visible "burning like oiled surfaces." "Prince of the new Pharisees," he calls him, and gives him many a passing thrust in the several cantos of his poem, until finally, in Paradise, he places in the mouth of Saint Peter that bitter invective against Boniface which makes the heavens blush with anger.

In October the four ambassadors arrived in Rome, but their mission was a fruitless one. Charles of Valois was already within the Florentine territory with his five hundred French knights and a large number of exiled Blacks, among them Corso Donati. The terrified Whites held many deliberations as to whether they should allow him

to enter the city or not ; but they dared not refuse admission to the representative of the Papal power backed by an army. They were accused of being Ghibellines, and to enter into open conflict with the Pope would confirm the charge. Hoping to conciliate the French prince, they sent an embassy to his camp. Charles received them with fine words, declaring that he came only to establish peace.

On the 1st of November Charles of Valois made his public entry into Florence. His course after his admission to the city is described by Villani, a contemporary, a Gueff, and an eye-witness :—

“Having rested and sojourned in Florence some days, he requested from the commune the government and protection of the city, and full power to reconcile the Guelfs among themselves, and it was granted. And on the 5th of November, in the church of Santa Maria Novella, the signory and priors being assembled there with their councils and the bishop and all the

other good people of Florence, his demands were made known and discussed, and the rule and protection of the city given to him. And Messer Charles, after the explanation of his interpreter, accepted and swore with his mouth, and as the son of a king promised to preserve the city in good and pacific state; and I, the writer, was present at these things. Yet immediately the opposite was done by him and by his people.”¹

The streets were soon filled with armed Frenchmen and with the exiled Blacks who had entered in their train. The Whites dared no longer venture out, and hastily fortified themselves in their houses. Corso Donati forced an entrance within the walls, and was immediately surrounded by his friends. He first threw open the doors of all the prisons; then, proceeding to the house of the podestà and the priors, he ordered those officers to return to their homes. He set fire to the houses of those who had been

¹ G. Villani, VIII. 49.

priors at the time of his banishment, and made prisoners of all the Whites whom he met on the way. The city was given up to the Blacks to burn, pillage, and destroy at their will, and the home of the absent Dante was with others plundered and demolished.

The "pacificator of Tuscany" made no effort to check this wholesale devastation. For many days anarchy reigned, and the Whites were too terrified to take any united measures for defence. New priors were elected and a new podestà, wholly devoted to the interests of the Black party. On the 16th of November Charles cited before him all the leaders of the Whites, whether nobles or people. Those who appeared were conducted to the frontiers; those who refused to appear were condemned as rebels and traitors, arrested in their homes, and heavily fined. Whoever prepared to escape by flight was punished by the confiscation

of his estates and the destruction of his dwelling. Charles did not fail to take advantage of these numerous fines and confiscations to enrich himself. When he demanded pay from the Pope for his pacific mission, Boniface replied in surprise, "Have I not already placed you at the fountain-head of gold?"

The Pope himself became alarmed at such excesses, and Cardinal Acquasparta was sent to Florence a second time to advise "more moderation in the office of peacemaker." The Cardinal endeavored to patch up a peace by marriages between the Cerchi and the Donati; but the peace was of short duration, and he again placed the city under an interdict.

Charles allowed the Blacks to continue their work of revenge, banishing all the Whites against whom any accusation could be found. From lack of pretexts a law was passed allowing to the podestà a retrospective

examination of the acts of every one who had filled the office of prior.

Dante, who was still in Rome, was included in this new proscription. On the 27th of January, 1302, he and three of his former colleagues were condemned. "Public rumor has brought to our ears," says the decree, "that when they were in the office of priors they were guilty, either themselves or through agents, of fraud, of deceit, of barratry, or unjust extortions; of receiving money, or written promises of money, for the election of their successors; of giving or expending money against the sovereign Pontiff and Prince Charles, to prevent his coming, or against the pacific state of the commune of Florence and the Guelf party; of introducing division into Pistoja; of plotting that the priors and gonfalonier of that city should be of the same party; finally, of ordering the expulsion of those citizens known as Blacks, faithful servants

of the Holy Church." For these crimes they were sentenced to pay a fine of three thousand lire, and in default of payment within three days their estates would be confiscated. Should the fine be paid within the time specified, they were still sentenced to two years' banishment from Tuscany, and forever excluded from public honors and offices within the city or territory; they were also cited to appear within three days to answer the charges made against them. It would have been impossible for Dante to present himself within the required time; indeed, the three days must have gone by before he heard of the decree. Nor could he well have paid the fine, since his estates had been plundered and destroyed with the rest.

On the 10th of March another sentence was pronounced against Dante. "Because he had neither paid the fine nor presented himself to the court, he was therefore accounted

guilty of contumacy, and of the crimes laid to his charge, and was sentenced to perpetual banishment, and if ever found within the limits of the commune, *to be burned alive*. "This," cries Boccaccio, "was the reward Dante received for his tender love to his country! This was the marble statue erected to the eternal memory of his worth! These were the letters with which his name was engraved on a golden tablet among those of the fathers of his country!"

Dante does not hesitate to ascribe his banishment to his patriotism. "We loved Florence so much that, *for having loved her*, we suffer exile unjustly."¹ He has scorned to defend himself from the charges of bribery and corruption; but he shows his contempt for these crimes by placing those who are guilty of them in one of the worst circles of the Inferno, in a lake of boiling pitch. The accusations were mere inventions. The

¹ De Vulgari Eloquio, Lib. I. Caput VI.

only one with any semblance of truth was that of opposing the coming of Charles of Valois. This he did sincerely, foreseeing that the French prince would carry the "lance of Judas," and would bring only ruin and sorrow to Florence.

In April Charles finished his work by unearthing a pretended conspiracy among the Whites, which furnished a pretext for banishing those of that unfortunate party who still lingered in the city. In the same month he took his departure, "having torn from the bosom of Florence the greater part of her flowers."¹

When Dante heard of the ruin of his party he hastened from Rome only to learn at Sienna the extent of his own private misfortunes,—the blight that had fallen upon his own life. At the age of thirty-seven he found himself a homeless exile, almost a beggar, with the great work which was to

¹ De Vulgari Eloquio, Lib. II. Caput VI.

make himself and Beatrice immortal still unwritten.

But we will not complain of Dante's miseries, says Thomas Carlyle. "Had all gone right with him, as he wished it, he might have been Prior, Podestà, or whatever they call it, of Florence, well accepted among neighbors,—and the world had wanted one of the most notable words ever spoken or sung. Florence would have had another prosperous Lord Mayor; and the ten dumb centuries continued voiceless, and the ten other listening centuries—for there will be ten of them and more—had no '*Divina Commedia*' to hear! We will complain of nothing. A nobler destiny was appointed for this Dante; and he, struggling like a man led toward death and crucifixion, could not help fulfilling it."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ART OF RETURNING.

“**I** HAVE pity for all unfortunates,” says Dante, “but most of all for those who languish in exile, and revisit their country only in dreams.”¹ Although banishment was a common occurrence in the Italian republics, — an accident to which every public man was liable, — it was nevertheless the saddest fate that could befall a Florentine. With the whole world outside for a prison, he could not be satisfied so long as the gates of Florence were closed against him. It became at once the life purpose of every exile to reopen those gates, whether by force, conspiracy, or persuasion.

Dante's first step was naturally to join himself to the other exiles, united by this

¹ De Vulgari Eloquio, Lib. II. Caput VI.

common purpose. To suppose, as have many Italian biographers of the poet, from Boccaccio down, that Dante was driven into the ranks of the Ghibellines by his indignation at the treatment received from the Guelfs, is to misunderstand the man. Witte, Wegele, Scartazzini, and other German Dante scholars unite in combating this view, and on just grounds. It is not credible that a man with Dante's strength of character,—a man so tenacious of his convictions,—could be driven from one political party to another by mere personal resentment. It is true that Dante was a Guelf, and had fought against the Ghibellines in the battle of Campaldino. But he was a Guelf through birth, through family tradition and education, rather than from deliberate choice. Instead of being a sudden transformation caused by indignation at his own personal wrongs, his adoption of the "ideal Ghibellinism," set forth in his book on Monarchy,

was the result of earnest examination, of "turning the eye of the spirit to the root of the matter." If *De Monarchia* was written before the author's banishment, as Professor Witte almost conclusively shows from internal evidence, we may accept the theory that "Dante had not only embraced Ghibelline opinions, but had already reduced them to a complete system."

It was not until after his banishment, however, that Dante, with the other exiled Whites, openly identified himself with the Ghibelline party. The Whites, as moderate Guelfs, had long been accused of leaning toward Ghibellinism, and now, in exile, they drifted naturally into that party to make common cause against the Blacks of Florence. At Sienna Dante met many of his companions in misfortune, and threw in his lot with them, the one aim of all being to get back to Florence. In the hope of accomplishing this purpose, they formally

resolved to unite with the Ghibellines of Tuscany and Romagna, and to fix their seat at Arezzo. Alessandro da Romena, of the old Ghibelline family of the Counts Guidi, was chosen captain of their forces. Twelve councillors, or advisers, were given him, one of whom was Dante. Disappointed, however, at the dissensions among the Aretines, the exiles removed to Forli, where they met a more favorable reception. Alliances were formed with Pistoja, Pisa, and Bologna, and an ambassador was sent to Verona to ask aid from the ruler of that city, Bartolomeo della Scala. The ambassador was Dante, and the journey proved an eventful one for him, since it taught him the "courtesy of the great Lombard." That he was successful in the direct object of his mission is not certain; but he met with an appreciative welcome from the Lord of Verona, and remained some time at his court. Whether it was at this time Dante first saw the

youthful *Cane*, who was to become his patron in later years, is a question for commentators to discuss.

In March, 1303, the Whites, together with the Ghibellines of Romagna and Bologna, attempted to besiege a castle belonging to the Florentines, but were surprised and defeated by the Blacks, under the lead of the Podestà of Florence. Those who fell into the hands of the victors were dragged to Florence and beheaded. Since Dante in no place refers to this defeat of his party, it is probable that he was not present. He may have been still in Verona.

The exiles were for a time disheartened, but an event soon occurred to give their affairs a more hopeful aspect. In October of the same year their implacable enemy, Pope Boniface VIII., died of chagrin at the humiliations heaped upon him by that same King of France whose aid he had invoked against Florence. He was succeeded by

Benedict XI., a pontiff far more peacefully inclined, "who was neither a Guelf nor a Ghibelline, but a common father; who did not sow discord but removed it." Benedict is almost the only contemporary pope who is not scourged with the lash of Dante's scorn, either in the *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*.

One of the first acts of the new Pope was to appoint a mediator for Florence. In March, 1304, the Cardinal of Prato was sent for the old task of pacifying the city.

But before attempting to recall the exiles it was necessary to restore order within the walls, for division and discord had by no means departed with the banished Whites. Old feuds being at last settled with the usual public kissings and rejoicings, negotiations were begun with the exiles. The latter had already approached Florence, and a messenger was despatched to them with a letter from the Cardinal, requesting them to lay down their arms and submit to his arbi-

tration. The exiles replied by asserting their peaceful intentions in a letter so nobly expressed that the authorship of it is generally attributed to Dante. He had now returned from Verona, and was again with his party serving as secretary to the leader. But the Blacks within the city, with all their divisions, were at least harmonious in this, that they had no desire to divide their power with the banished Whites, or to restore the confiscated estates. The efforts of the Cardinal, therefore, came to nought, and he abandoned the city in anger, leaving behind him the interdict, to which Florence had by this time become inured. There was still within the city, however, a party favorable to the exiles, and renewed street combats led to a destructive fire by which seventeen hundred houses were devoured.

Meanwhile Pope Benedict summoned to his court at Perugia the heads of the Black party, including Corso Donati, to account for

their treatment of the Papal legate. The Whites and Ghibellines resolved to take advantage of this absence of their most powerful adversaries to surprise the city and force an entrance. A day was appointed on which all the forces were to assemble at the village of Lastra, two miles from Florence, for a united attack. A hot-headed young Florentine, who commanded one division, arrived two days before the time appointed. Instead of awaiting his Ghibelline allies and surprising the city by night, he began the attack at once on a hot July day. With waving banners, glittering swords, and crowns of olive branches, the first columns pressed forward without opposition to the heart of the city, crying "Peace! peace!" To their disappointment the people of Florence, on whose support they had counted, turned against them. A fire suddenly breaking out, the invaders were seized with panic, and fled in disorder, throwing away their arms. Not far

from the city they were met by the expected reinforcements, whose leader strove in vain to induce the panic-stricken fugitives to turn back with him and renew the attack. He was forced against his will to join the retreat.

We do not know whether Dante was present or took any part in this unfortunate attempt, but at all events he had learned with his companions "how difficult the art of returning."

The former leader of the Whites, Alessandro da Romena, was not present at this undertaking, and it is probable that he was prevented by sickness, since he died within the year. That Dante lost a friend and patron at his death is evident from the letter of condolence written to the two nephews of the Count: "The illustrious Count Alessandro, your uncle, whose soul in recent days has returned to that celestial country whence it came, was my lord, and his memory while I live shall rule over me; for his

magnanimity, which is now worthily rewarded above the stars, made me his vassal from of old. . . . Mourn, then; let the greatest family of Tuscany mourn, distinguished by such a man. Let all his friends and subjects mourn, whose hopes are cruelly shattered by his death. Among these last must I unhappy mourn, who, driven from my country, unjustly exiled, dwelling always on my misfortunes, consoled myself with dear hopes in him." The letter shows, too, that the poet had already suffered from the "dry wind of dolorous poverty." He excuses his absence from the burial of his patron, explaining that he is held back, "not by negligence or ingratitude, but by the unexpected poverty brought by exile. As a cruel oppressor, she has driven me, deprived of arms and horses, into the den of her captivity, and although struggling with all my powers to escape, so far prevailing, the wicked one endeavors to hold me."

CHAPTER X.

WANDERINGS.

AFTER the failure of the exiles to force an entrance into Florence, the real wanderings of Dante begin. Reduced to poverty by the confiscation of his property, and dependent on the patronage of such noblemen as could appreciate his genius, he had now to learn

“How savoreth of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another’s stairs.”

To be robbed of his independence was a bitter experience for him who had so little of the courtier in his disposition. According to Villani, “this Dante, on account of his learning, was somewhat haughty and shy and disdainful, and like a philosopher

almost ungracious, not knowing how to converse with the ignorant."

It is impossible to follow the wanderings of the poet with certain footstep, since almost every city, village, castle, or convent in all Italy claims to have been his resting-place at some period. Biographers agree that he spent some time at the university of Bologna, but differ as to the date. Probabilities point to the year 1305 as the time of his residence there, when, after so many disappointments, he returned once more to the "consolations of philosophy."

For the exile, however, it would seem there could be no permanent resting-place. In the spring of 1306, at the instigation of Florence, the Whites were banished from Bologna. In revenge for this, Cardinal Orsini placed the city under an interdict and deprived her of her university, excommunicating all who should study there. As was customary in such cases, teachers

and learners betook themselves to Padua to continue their instruction. In all probability Dante was among their number. At least his presence in Padua is shown by a document dated August 27, 1306, bearing his name as a witness: "Dante Alighieri of Florence, now at Padua, living in the street of San Lorenzo." Another document, dated a few weeks later, proves his presence in Lunigiana, in northern Tuscany, with the Marquises of Malaspina. The document shows that on the 6th of October he was commissioned by them to conclude in their name a treaty of peace with the Bishop of Luni, with whom they had long been at war. The family of Malaspina has had the additional honor of being immortalized by the gratitude of Dante. His friend and patron was Maroello Malaspina, Marquis of Villafranca, who received the poet with so much kindness and friendship as to call forth the grateful eulogy uttered

to Currado, an ancestor of the family, in Purgatory.¹ How long Dante enjoyed this friendly shelter we know not. He had not yet definitely separated from his fellow exiles, and neither he nor they had abandoned the hope of re-entering Florence.

The rule of Benedict XI., the good Pope who had been so peaceably inclined toward the Whites and Ghibellines, was of short duration. He died at Perugia on the very day of that disastrous defeat of the exiles in 1304. A whole year passed before the College of Cardinals could agree upon his successor. In January, 1305, they elected a Frenchman, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, a blind tool of Philip the Fair, King of France. With the new Pontiff, who took the name of Clement V., began the so-called "Babylonian captivity" of the Church. He removed the Papal court to Avignon, never once crossing the Alps or setting

¹ Purgatorio, VIII. 121.

foot in Italy. He did not neglect, however, to follow the example of his predecessors in sending a cardinal to pacify Tuscany, which was sadly in need of peace.

The cities belonging to the Whites and Ghibellines were Pisa, Pistoja, and Arezzo. Florence and Lucca represented the Blacks. In May, 1305, Pistoja was surrounded by the Florentines and Lucchese, who carried on the siege for eleven months with excesses of cruelty unknown before in Tuscany. Cardinal Orsini, the Papal legate, ordered the assailants to withdraw; but his commands were treated with contempt, and in April, 1306, Pistoja was obliged to surrender. Her territory was divided between Florence and Lucca, the Whites and Ghibellines were driven out, and two months were spent in tearing down the city walls and dismantling fortresses and palaces. Indignant at the total disregard of his com-

mands shown by the Florentines, Cardinal Orsini assembled the Whites and Ghibellines for one more grand effort against the party which remained so implacable. A Papal legate at the head of a Ghibelline army to punish the Guelfs for their disobedience to the Church,—this was a strange confusion of party lines, showing that the titles Guelf and Ghibelline had become mere names.

The hopes of the exiles again revived, and Dante joined himself to the undertaking. He was one of eighteen prominent men of the party who signed a treaty by which they obliged themselves to indemnify the Ubaldini for all losses incurred in the war against Florence. The Ubaldini were lords of the castle of Montaccianico, which was at that time besieged by the Florentines. In this castle were assembled, says Villani, “almost all the rebels, Whites and Ghibellines, banished from Florence.” Bribery

prevailed where force had failed, and the Ubaldini treacherously sold their castle to the Florentines, who demolished it from the foundations. Florence remained impervious to the repeated threats, curses, and excommunications fulminated by Cardinal Orsini; and the Ghibelline army assembled by him failed to accomplish anything.

From this time Dante is no longer found in the company of his fellow exiles. Imbittered by repeated disappointments, and humiliated by their lack of harmony and their many acts of folly, he definitely separated from their "bad and foolish company," to form a "party by himself." From his words in the *Paradiso* there was evidently an open rupture, with recriminations on both sides. "Ungrateful, mad, and wicked shall they become against thee," says Cacciaguida in the famous prophecy. We are told by Leonardo Bruni that at this time "Dante became very humble, seeking by

good works and good behavior to obtain the favor of being allowed to return to Florence through a spontaneous recall from those who ruled the land. And for this purpose he labored much and wrote many letters, not only to principal citizens of the government, but even to the people; among others a long letter beginning, 'My people, what have I done to thee?'"

After the formal separation from the exiles it is probable that Dante first returned to his friend and patron Maroello, of Malaspina, from whom he was always sure of a generous welcome. In connection with his stay here, Boccaccio gives a fanciful account of the recovery of the first seven cantos of the *Inferno*. The story may be qualified with the narrator's own advice to each reader, to "believe just what seems most true and probable to himself." Boccaccio claims to have heard the story from the poet's nephew, Andrea Poggi, "marvellously

like him in form and feature," who often talked with the biographer concerning Dante's habits and ways.

When Dante and his party were exiled, and the Blacks were devastating the city, plundering and confiscating on every hand, Madonna Gemma, the wife of whom we hear so little, had been able to save a few valuables, including some legal papers and other writings, which she had placed in chests and hidden away in a safe place. Five years later, when the city had become somewhat quieted, she was advised to recover a part of Dante's property by claiming it as her dowry. For this purpose certain writings were needed, and the nephew Andrea was sent, with an attorney, to search for them in the old chests. While the lawyer was examining the legal papers, Andrea discovered certain other writings, sonnets and canzoni, and among them the first seven cantos of the *Inferno*. "This he read again

and again ; and although he understood but little of it, yet it seemed to him a very beautiful thing, and he resolved, in order to learn what it was, to take it to a worthy man of our city, himself a famous reciter in rhyme, whose name was Dino, son of Messer Lambertuccio Frescobaldi." The said Dino, perceiving the beauty of the work, and that it was incomplete, after making copies of it for his friends sent it to the Marquis of Malaspina, "who was a man of understanding and who had a singular friendship for Dante," begging him to persuade the poet to continue it. "The seven cantos having reached the Marquis's hands, and having marvellously pleased him, he showed them to Dante ; and having heard from him that they were his composition, he entreated him to continue the work." "To this it is said that Dante replied : 'I certainly thought that these, together with all my other effects and many writings, were destroyed when

my house was sacked, and therefore I had wholly taken my mind from them. But since it has pleased God that they should not be lost, and have even been sent back to me, I will do all I can to complete the work according to my first intention.' And thus entering into the old thoughts and resuming the interrupted work, he begins the eighth canto with these words: 'I say continuing.'"

"Now, precisely the same story," says Boccaccio, "almost without any alteration, has been related to me by a Ser Dino Perino, one of our citizens and an intelligent man, who according to his own account had been on the most friendly and familiar terms with Dante; but he so far alters the story, that he says it was not Andrea but he himself who was sent by the lady to the chests for the papers and found the seven cantos and took them to Dino." Boccaccio twice relates this story, —

once in the biography of Dante, written in his youth, and again in the Commentary, composed in the last years of his life. He throws some doubt on it, however, by showing that the first seven cantos of the *Inferno* could hardly have been written before Dante's exile. No doubt certain writings of Dante's, including sonnets and canzoni, were found in the old chests and sent to the Marquis of Malaspina; but there is little reason to believe that these pages contained any part of the *Inferno*.

From this time the wanderings of Dante again become uncertain. There is a tradition of his travelling to Paris and sustaining a dispute with the doctors in the schools of theology. Balzac has founded a novel on this legend, but it rests upon no reliable authority. The romantic letter of Frate Ilario, describing Dante's visit to the cloister of Santa Croce del Corvo, and the leaving of the manuscript of the *Inferno*, must

also be regretfully given up as a fiction. In fact, all definite trace of Dante's footsteps for the next two or three years is lost.

But if we are unable to follow him in this wandering life, we are left in no uncertainty as to the nature of it. He has given us in the *Convito* a pathetic picture of himself. "Ah, would it had pleased the Dispenser of the universe that my excuse had never been needed; that neither others had done me wrong, nor myself undergone penalty unjustly,—the penalty, I say, of exile and of poverty! Since it pleased the citizens of the fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome—Florence—to cast me out of her most sweet bosom, where I was born and bred and passed the half of my life, and where with her good leave I desire with all my heart to rest my weary spirit and finish the time allotted me, I have wandered in almost every place where our language extends, a stranger, almost a beggar, exposing

against my will the wounds of fortune, often unjustly imputed to the wounded. Truly, I have been a vessel without sail and without a rudder, driven to different ports and shores by the dry wind which dolorous poverty breathes forth; and I have appeared vile in the eyes of many who perhaps by some better report had conceived of me a different impression, and in whose sight not only has my person become debased, but all of my work, whether already done or yet to do, is less esteemed."¹

Not until 1310 do Dante's footprints again become visible, when the news of Henry VII.'s descent into Italy rekindled his hopes for himself and for his country, and aroused him into new activity.

¹ Convito, Trattato I. Capitolo 3.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EMPEROR HENRY VII.

FOR sixty years Italy had not been disturbed by the emperors. After the downfall of the Hohenstauffens, the popes had so far obtained the supremacy, that the German emperors, instead of wasting their strength contending for the vain shadow of authority over the peninsula, contented themselves with strengthening their position at home. In the case of the last three emperors the important ceremony of coming to Rome to receive the crown at the hands of the Pope had been omitted. Dante sternly denounces the Hapsburgs for allowing the "garden of the Empire to be waste," and reproaches Rudolf for neglecting his duty

when he had it in his power to "heal the wounds that have slain Italy."¹

In 1308 a new emperor was elected, — a romantic prince who dreamed of restoring the former glory of the "Holy Roman Empire." From the time of his election Henry of Luxembourg thought only of a pilgrimage to Italy, where he hoped to reconcile all parties and make the dignity of the Imperial crown respected as of old. Having obtained from Clement V. the promise of a public coronation at Rome, he sent ambassadors to the cities of Italy to announce the proposed expedition.

For more than half a century the Italian Ghibellines, nominally fighting for the Empire, had been practically without a head. From time to time they had appealed to the emperors for help, but the only recognition they had received was the occasional presence of an Imperial vicar with a handful

¹ Purgatorio, VI. and VII.

of German troops. The announcement that the Emperor himself was about to descend among them filled the disheartened Ghibellines with new life. In fancy they saw themselves restored to their homes and reinstated in power. The poet Cino da Pistoja, Dante's friend, echoed the song of Simeon: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Such an event would naturally take a powerful hold upon Dante's feelings, especially in view of his lonely wanderings. The wonderful past of Italy was more vividly present to him than to any other man then living. The hope and enthusiasm aroused in his heart by the grateful news are seen in the letter addressed by him to the rulers of Italy:—

"To each and all the Kings of Italy, to the Senators of Rome, to the Dukes, Marquises, and Counts, and to the people, the humble Italian Dante Alighieri, of Florence, undeservedly exiled, prays peace.

"Behold now is the acceptable time, in which

the signs of peace and consolation arise. For a new light is breaking, revealing the dawn which already dispels the shadows of our long calamity; now the morning breezes gather; the lips of Heaven are reddening, and with tranquil radiance encourage the hopes of the people. Soon we shall behold the expected joy, we who have dwelt so long in the desert; for the peaceful sun will arise, and justice, now languishing like a flower deprived of the sunlight, will grow green again when He shakes his locks. All those who hunger and thirst shall satisfy themselves in the light of his rays, and those who love iniquity shall be confounded by his dazzling countenance.

“Rejoice then, O Italy, now to be pitied by the Saracens, soon thou shalt be an object of envy to the whole world; for thy bridegroom, the consolation of the world and the glory of thy people, the gracious Henry, Divine and Augustus and Cæsar, is hastening to thy nuptials. Dry thy tears and remove the traces of sorrow, O beautiful one; for he is near who will free thee from the chains of the wicked.”

Dante praises the justice and clemency of the Emperor, whom he hails as a second Moses, and exhorts his countrymen to offer

their submission and to sing psalms of penitence. But although they are to obey the Emperor, they are also "as free people" to preserve their own government. He has stated in "*De Monarchia*" that "the king is made for the people, not the people for the king." He encourages those who suffer oppression, "for their salvation is at hand." He begs them to lay aside their enmities, to "rid the soil of arid animosities that the celestial dew may not fall in vain." "Pardon, pardon, now, O dear ones, who with me have suffered injustice, that the shepherd may know you as the sheep of his flock." He expresses his political conviction that the power of the Emperor does not depend upon that of the Pope, but that both derive their authority directly from God himself, independently of each other. He concludes by warning his countrymen not to err as do the heathen, wandering in the vanity of a mind darkened by shadows;

“but open the eyes of the spirit and see how the Lord of Heaven has appointed us a king. This is he whom Peter, the Vicar of God, admonishes us to honor; whom Clement, now the successor of Peter, illumines with the light of the apostolic benediction; that where the spiritual ray does not suffice, the splendor of the minor light may irradiate.”

Pope Clement V. had confirmed the election of Henry VII. and given his consent to the Italian journey in the hope of finding in him an instrument for a new crusade, which he ardently desired. Dante placed great stress on this sanction of the Pope, thinking Guelfs and Ghibellines might thereby be reconciled. The hopes which Dante founded on the coming of the Emperor were not those of selfish interest. True, he longed to return to Florence; but he desired before everything else the unity of Italy.

“Within his breast the mighty poet bore
A patriot’s heart, warm with undying fire.”

Peace, he thought, could only be restored to Italy by bringing all parties under the rule of an enlightened monarch. “And peace,” says Dante, “is the first blessing of mankind.” Nor can he be accused of invoking foreign intervention. Italy was already in the hands of foreigners. She had become “the hostelry of sorrow, a ship without a pilot in a great tempest.” The Pope, the nominal head of the Guelfs, was not only a Frenchman, but the servant of the King of France. Moreover, to Dante the Emperor was not a foreigner, but the legitimate successor of the Cæsars. To him the Holy Roman Empire was ordained of God and confirmed by the Church. His dream was, not to place his country under the control of Germany, but to make Italy, the seat of empire, mistress of the world.

In October, 1310, Henry VII. arrived in

Italy with an army of five thousand men, consisting principally of adventurers in search of fortune. The German nobles took little part in the expedition. The Ghibelline chiefs hastened to greet him, and Dante also proffered his homage. "I saw thee most benign, as befits Imperial Majesty, I heard thee most clement," he writes, "when my hands touched thy feet and my lips paid their debt. Then my spirit exulted within me, and I said to myself: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!'" All contemporary writers agree in praising Henry VII. Villani, a declared Guelf, pronounces him "good, wise, just and gracious, honest, brave, and fearless." His views were lofty but impracticable. At the outset he disappointed the Ghibellines by declaring that he came not for one but for all; not to place himself at the head of a party, but to heal all differences.

The Florentines, however, far more Guelf than the Pope himself, would have nothing to do with the Emperor. On the first announcement of his coming they informed his ambassadors that Henry would be acknowledged as king only on condition that he attempted no changes whatever in Tuscany. Later they prepared for a decided resistance. Alliances were formed with King Robert of Naples and with the other Guelf cities. An army was equipped, the city was fortified, and, to hinder the approach of the Emperor, much gold was lavished in inciting to revolt the Lombard cities that lay in his path.

At the stand taken by his native city Dante's grief and indignation knew no bounds. He addressed an eloquent letter, filled with warnings and reproaches, "to those most wicked Florentines who are within the city." The letter begins by claiming that the Empire is ordained from

on high in order that the human race may live in peace and security. It reproaches the Florentines for transgressing the laws human and divine, paints in dark colors the evils that their stubborn resistance and presumption will bring upon them, and concludes with the announcement that the time of repentance is past; that they can expect from the Emperor nothing but the just punishment of their misdeeds. The date of the letter shows that Dante had returned to Tuscany soon after his interview with the Emperor. It is written on the 31st of March, 1311, "at the confines of Tuscany, near the springs of the Arno;" that is, in the Casentino, probably in the castle of Porciano belonging to the Counts Guidi. The poet's threats and denunciations made no impression on the Florentines, who continued their preparations for resistance. The only effect of the letter was to confirm the sentence of banishment against its

author. When the signory, to strengthen their own forces and weaken those of the enemy, decided to recall the majority of the exiles, a number were excepted by name from the general amnesty, among them Dante Alighieri,—a proceeding by which the spirit of Dante must have been imbittered against Florence to the last degree.

The Emperor still tarried in Lombardy. At first the Lombard cities had acknowledged him, allowing him to restore exiles, whether Guelf or Ghibelline, to their homes, and to leave an Imperial vicar in each city. Thinking to increase his prestige, he had himself crowned with the iron crown at Milan, as “King of the Romans.” During the coronation a tumult broke out, which was soon quelled, only to be followed by revolts in the other Lombard cities. Henry, unwilling to leave any enemy in his rear, besieged each of these cities in turn. The Ghibellines became anxious and impa-

tient, seeing time wasted and force expended in subduing these minor cities while Florence, the chief enemy and the inciter of the revolts, was constantly gathering strength.

On the 16th of April another letter was written "at the confines of Tuscany, near the source of the Arno." It was addressed to the Emperor, complaining of this delay in the name of Dante "and of those Tuscans who desire peace on the earth."

"We have long mourned above the rivers of confusion," says the letter, "and have incessantly implored the protection of our rightful prince. At the approach of the successor of Cæsar and of Augustus we checked our sighs and dried the flood of our tears. We hail thee as a rising Sun, who should shed upon Italy new hope of a better age! But because this Sun seems to delay, or even to retrograde, as if commanded by a new Joshua, or the son of Amos, we in uncertainty are forced to doubt, and to exclaim with the Forerunner: 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' . . . We marvel at thy delay! Conqueror in the

valley of the Po, thou leavest Tuscany abandoned and neglected, as if the rights of the Empire were circumscribed by the confines of Liguria. . . . Blush, then, to tarry in a narrow corner of the Earth, when a whole world awaits thee! Wilt thou linger in Milan through the Spring as well as the Winter, and dost thou hope to destroy the poisonous Hydra by cutting off its heads? Trees are not destroyed by lopping off their branches, which only shoot out more vigorously so long as the roots remain in the ground to furnish nourishment. What wilt thou boast of having accomplished, sole ruler of the world, when thou hast bent the neck of rebellious Cremona? Will not the madness break out again in Brescia or Pavia? Truly. And when thou hast punished these it will spring up in Vercelli, or Bergamo, or elsewhere, until the radical cause is removed, —until the root of so much evil is destroyed that the branches may dry up with the trunk.”

Unmoved by these warnings, the Emperor pursued his own way, determined to leave no rebellious city behind him. Having subdued Cremona, he spent four months in

besieging Brescia, where the cruelty of the siege injured his prestige, and the heat of an Italian summer decimated his army. In the spring of 1312 he advanced to Rome for the long-deferred ceremony of the coronation. The army of King Robert of Naples opposed his entrance, and it was only after bloody street battles that he succeeded in having the crown placed upon his head by the Papal legate.

Henry now saw the necessity of abandoning his neutral position and placing himself at the head of the Ghibelline party. In September, 1312, he was finally ready to move against Florence, but his hesitating policy prevented any result; and after encamping for a month before the walls, without any effect, he withdrew to Poggibonzi. He was obliged to content himself with hurling, in all solemnity, that antiquated weapon, the "Ban of the Empire," against Florence and King Robert of Naples.

Another year passed in fruitless procedure, when the Emperor died suddenly at Buonconvento, without having filled, or even comprehended, the heroic rôle assigned to him by Dante. The Guelfs celebrated the event with public rejoicings, with bonfires and processions, "singing psalms of praise to the Giver of Peace." The Ghibellines, on the other hand, were completely disheartened by their loss, and scattered in every direction.

Dante's hopes of returning to Florence, as well as his fantastic dream of a united Italy, were buried in the Emperor's grave. Notwithstanding these failures, however, he continued to revere the memory of the Emperor, and honored him with a seat in the great white rose of the tenth heaven, as "the good Henry, who came to reform Italy before she was prepared."

CHAPTER XII.

LUCCA AND PISA.

FOR a time we again lose sight of the wanderer's footsteps. Tradition sends him, in the first shock of disappointment, to his friend Bosone Raffaelli of Gubbio, and to the neighboring cloister of Santa Croce, at Fonte Avellana. A room in the monastery is still known as Dante's room, and bears an inscription stating that Dante dwelt here, and composed in this room no small part of his divine poem. We are told by Leonardo Bruni that after the death of the Emperor "hope was wholly lost by Dante, since he himself had closed the path of pardon by writing and speaking against those who governed the city, and no way remained through which he could hope to return by

force." "Having given up all hope, he passed the rest of his life very poor, dwelling in various places in Tuscany, Lombardy, and Romagna, under the protection of different princes." But in disappointment and seclusion he did not lose interest in the affairs of Italy.

The death of Henry VII. was followed within eight months by the death of Clement V., a pontiff who has received nearly as much of Dante's scorn as Boniface. Twenty-four cardinals assembled in conclave at Carpentras, a city of Provence, to elect his successor. Only six of them were Italians, the remainder being either Frenchmen or other foreigners under French influence. The Italians hoped for the election of an Italian Pope, who should restore the Papal Court to Rome and put an end to the "Babylonian captivity" of the Church. Dante also earnestly desired this end, and addressed an eloquent letter to the Italian

cardinals, urging them to fight manfully for Italy. The letter is divided between bitter reproaches and earnest pleadings. It opens with that lament of Jeremiah, used years before by Dante at the death of Beatrice: "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become as a widow, she that was great among nations!" He boldly declares that the cupidity of the priesthood has brought about the evils of Italy and given the enemies of the Church occasion to scoff. As a Christian and a follower of the Holy Church he must mourn her disgrace, which he accuses the cardinals of causing. He rebukes them for guiding the sheep in the wrong path, for making merchandise of the most sacred trusts. He bids them blush for the disgrace they have caused, nor think that he stands alone, a Phoenix in the world. "All whisper, or think, what I speak aloud." The poet's words were without avail. The Italian car-

dinals were wholly in the power of the French, and after a long deliberation a Frenchman was elected, Pope John XXII., and the Papal Court remained at Avignon.

The letter is of interest to us as showing the non-partisan character of Dante's views. If, as a Ghibelline, he desired the Emperor's presence in Italy, he also desired the return of the Pope. "The two suns were necessary in his system." He was actuated by what he considered the good of Italy, rather than by the interests of his party. The date of the letter is not given, but it was evidently written in the first months of the vacancy of the Holy See, before the powerlessness of the Italian cardinals was made apparent.

The Imperial throne was also vacant. No successor to Henry of Luxembourg had yet been elected. But the Ghibellines, although at first apparently crushed by their loss, were beginning to take heart again. The centre of their efforts was Pisa, now almost the only

Ghibelline city in Tuscany. Here the body of the Emperor had been brought for burial, and here was that remnant of his army which had not returned home. The Pisans sought to strengthen their position by placing the control of the city in able hands. They offered it first to Frederic of Arragon, and on his refusal to Uguccione della Faggiola. This Uguccione, the gigantic, was the same in whom the Whites had vainly put their trust years before, when he was acting as podestà of Arezzo. He had now, however, become a more decided Ghibelline. He had been a warm adherent of the Emperor, who had appointed him Imperial Vicar in Genoa. Uguccione accepted the proffered trust, and entered Pisa in 1314 as the acknowledged head of the Ghibelline party. He at once changed its tactics, and instead of waiting to defend himself became the aggressor. He marched his army against Lucca, the time-honored enemy of Pisa, of whom he de-

manded two things,—the restoration of all castles and strongholds which she had taken from Pisa in times past, and permission for the banished Ghibellines of Lucca to return to their homes. Both demands were granted. The exiles were not only admitted, but recovered possession of their confiscated estates. Not satisfied, they demanded also the restoration of their political rights. Many street battles followed, and with the help of the Pisans the newly-restored exiles drove out the Guelfs, together with the vicar of King Robert of Naples, and Lucca became subject to Pisa, with Ugguccione as lord of both cities.

After these events we again find definite trace of Dante in Lucca and Pisa, under the protection of Ugguccione and his son. Here, we may believe, he found a more permanent resting-place, and some gleams of happiness in the society of his sons, in the continuation of his poem, and the

friendship of that Gentucca who was to make the city of Lucca dear to him. It is idle to speculate on the identity of Gentucca or her relation to the poet. Dante's brief reference in the *Purgatorio* is most probably an expression of gratitude for some kindness.

The importance of Uguccione was increasing. A double election had taken place in Germany, and the close contest for the throne kept both claimants out of Italy. Ludwig of Bavaria, however, had an eye on Italian affairs, and stimulated Uguccione and his sons in their efforts against the Guelfs by investing them in advance with such castles as they might conquer from the enemies of the Empire. Elated with his success in Lucca, Uguccione began the siege of Montecatini, a fortified town ten miles from Florence. The Florentines, with all of their Guelf allies, hastened to relieve the besieged. A battle was fought, one of the most destructive in the history

of mediæval Tuscany. "It concerned," says an old historian, "not so much the stronghold of Montecatini, as the question which of the two factions, Guelf or Ghibelline, should prevail in Italy." The battle resulted in a complete victory for the Ghibellines. Two thousand Guelfs were slain and fifteen hundred taken prisoner. "In Florence, Bologna, Siena, Perugia, and Naples, the whole population were clad in mourning for the lost citizens." Ugguccione lost few men, but among them was his son Francesco.

The new sentence passed against Dante two months later—November 6, 1315—seems to indicate that he had some share in these events. It is not probable that the poet, then over fifty years of age, was present in person on the field; but since the severe sentence extended to his sons, it is thought that the latter, now grown to manhood, may have taken part in the battle. By the vicar of King Robert, to whom

the Florentines had given control of their city, "certain Ghibellines and rebels," among them Dante Alighieri and his sons, were condemned, if ever found within the Republic, to be led to the place of justice and have their heads severed from their bodies; and that they might not glory in their disobedience, they were declared outlaws, and license given to any who desired, to injure them in person or property. The declared motive of the sentence was the contempt shown to the summons of the Republic, and the refusal to pay the fine; but it is usually regarded as an act of retaliation for the defeat of Montecatini.

Thus Dante was for the third time sentenced to exile, and for the second time condemned to death, though he might laugh at the sentence so long as the Ghibellines remained victorious, with his friend Uggucione at their head. The latter, however, instead of profiting by his victory for the

good of the party, only used it to strengthen his own position. Inflated by success, he became tyrannical and made himself unpopular in Pisa as well as in Lucca, where his son Neri was acting as podestà. A tumult arose in Lucca, and Neri appealed to his father for help, but was obliged to flee before his arrival. Uguccione hastened from Pisa to his son's aid; but as soon as he was well out of the city the Pisans arose, burned his palace, slew his family, elected new rectors, and gave the control of the city to another. Thus in one day the victor of Montecatini lost two cities and became himself a fugitive. He took refuge with Can Grande of Verona, who appointed him commander of his army.

Since Lucca no longer offered Dante a safe shelter, nor indeed was any to be found in Tuscany, he followed his fallen patron to Verona.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARDON REJECTED.

FOR fourteen years had Dante been a homeless exile, looking ever with longing eyes toward Florence. One hope after another had faded away, yet his desire to return was no less eager than at first. In addition to the sentence of perpetual banishment passed against him, he had been condemned to be burned alive, had been excepted from the general amnesty of 1311, and finally sentenced to lose his head at the hands of the executioner, if ever found within the limits of the Republic.

But now, at last, when over fifty years of age, an opportunity was offered him of returning to end his days in that "beloved sheepfold of Saint John," which was ever in

his thoughts. Freed from all fear of their enemies by the fall of Ugguccione, the Florentines had placed at the head of the government men inclined to peace. A proclamation was issued permitting all political exiles to return to Florence under certain conditions. From this amnesty Dante was not excepted.

It was a Florentine custom to release certain prisoners on the feast-day of John the Baptist, as an offering to the city's patron saint. The candidates for pardon were required to march in public procession through the streets of the city, with mitres on their heads and lighted candles in their hands, following the car of the mint to the Baptistery. Arrived at the church, they were obliged to make public confession of their guilt and to pay a stipulated sum of money, after which they were "offered up" to the saint, the sentences against them were cancelled, and they were pronounced free.

These were the conditions now offered to political exiles, by which they should place themselves on a level with criminals of every class. The conditions were humiliating; yet many of the weary, homesick exiles accepted them, glad to be restored to their country at any price. Friends and relatives in Florence who desired the return of Dante, particularly his nephew and a monk related to him, wrote urging him to avail himself of this opportunity. But the proud spirit of Dante could not so humble itself. Conscious of his innocence, he would not dishonor himself by making a confession of guilt. Happily the letter has been preserved in which he scornfully refuses this privilege:—

“From your letter, received by me with due reverence and affection, I have learned with grateful mind and with careful consideration how much you have at heart my return to my country; for which I am the more deeply bound

to you, since an exile rarely finds a friend. To its contents I reply ; and if the answer is not such as the pusillanimity of some would desire, I pray you affectionately to give it your mature consideration before condemning it.

“This, then, is what has been signified to me through the letters of your nephew and mine, as well as by several other friends, concerning the proclamation recently made in Florence with reference to the absolution of the exiles: that if I wish to pay a certain sum of money and submit to the disgrace of public penance, I shall be pardoned and may return at once. Herein, my father, are two things ridiculous and ill-advised. Ill-advised, I say, in those who mention such things to me ; for your letter, conceived more discreetly and more carefully, contains nothing of the kind. Is this, then, the glorious manner in which Dante Alighieri is recalled to his country after suffering an exile of almost three lustres? Has an innocence patent to all merited this? Is this the reward of the sweat and fatigue endured in study? Far from a man the housemate of Philosophy, this baseness fit for a heart of clay, that he should suffer himself to be offered up in chains at the altar, like a Ciolo or any other criminal! Far from a

man, the preacher of justice, that he, unjustly injured, should pay a fine to those who have injured him, as if for a favor! This is not the way to return to my country, O my father. If, however, any other can be found, by you or by others, which shall not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that will I enter with no lagging steps. But if by no such way can Florence be entered, then will I never enter. What! can I not anywhere enjoy the light of the sun and of the stars? Can I not under any spot of the heavens meditate sweet truths without first giving myself up ingloriously, almost in ignominy, to the people and to the city of Florence? Nor, I trust, will bread fail me."

This letter bears no date; but from the reference to almost three lustres (fifteen years) of exile, it was probably written near the end of the year 1316. In this year the privilege of returning under the conditions stated was three times offered to the exiles,—on the 2d of June, on the 3d of September, and on the 11th of September. "Oh, praiseworthy disdain of a great soul," ex-

claims Boccaccio, "how manfully hast thou acted, repressing the ardent desire to return through a path unworthy a man nourished in the bosom of Philosophy!"

Dante's indignant letter is the most eloquent vindication of his life. In the proud consciousness of an innocence "patent to all," he scorned to purchase pardon at the price of honor; and thus the world was spared the spectacle of Dante Alighieri with a lighted candle in his hand and a paper mitre on his head, as a sign of infamy, doing public penance in the streets of Florence.

If Dante, to preserve his manhood, could admire the beauty of the sun and stars, and could meditate sweetest truths under any spot of the heavens, it by no means follows that his desire to return to Florence had cooled. The pathetic opening of the twenty-fifth canto of the *Paradiso*, written in the last years of his life, shows that he

still "revisited his country in dreams." After beholding all the glories of Paradise and looking back in derision on the smallness and meanness of "this poor little globe of ours," his thoughts return to worldly affairs and to his own disappointment and longing:—

"If e'er it happen that the poem sacred,
To which both heaven and earth have set their hand,
So that it many a year hath made me lean,
O'ercome the cruelty that bars me out
From that loved sheepfold where a lamb I slumbered,
An enemy to the wolves that war upon it,
With other voice forthwith, with other fleece,
Poet will I return, and at my font
Baptismal will I take the laurel crown."¹

Again, in answer to the friend who invited him to come to Bologna to be crowned as a poet, he writes: "Would it not be better to adorn my head with the triumphal wreath in my own country if ever I return there, hiding my white hair beneath its leaves?"

¹ Par. XXV. Longfellow's translation.

But even the sacred poem failed to unbar those implacable gates. How could Florence foresee that "this poor old exile, sad and worn," would one day become "Latium's other Virgil," and that centuries after she would be begging in vain for the very bones to which she had refused a resting-place?

CHAPTER XIV.

VERONA.

THE hopes of the Ghibellines, ever becoming weaker as one disappointment followed another, were now centred in Verona, and in her brilliant young ruler, Cane della Scala. After the events which deprived Uguccione of Lucca and Pisa, that distinguished warrior had withdrawn to Verona and entered the service of Cane as field commander. Verona was also the natural asylum for Dante, the impassioned pleader of this hopeless cause. In the first years of his exile he had tested the hospitality of the city and of its rulers, the Scaligers, the head of the family being at that time Bartolomeo. Now, in 1317, he came

again, not as a stranger, to the city which had been his "earliest refuge."

In the valley of the Adige, surrounded by the spurs of the Alps, was situated the old Verona of Catullus and Pliny, as well as the Verona of the Nibelungen. Later buildings and monuments mark the capital city of Theodoric, and now it was to become still more famous as the Verona of Can Grande and Dante. Here was the old Roman amphitheatre, nearly fifteen hundred feet in circumference, which, with its forty-five concentric tiers of seats, is thought by some to have been the model for the material form of the *Inferno*. Viewed by moonlight from the top of its battlements, more than one hundred feet high, it is weird enough to suggest that idea. In the valley below the city is the remarkable avalanche of stone from the mountain-side which, long before Dante's day, overwhelmed a village, and with its indescribable chaos of rock is used by

him to picture the barrier which separates the circle of the violent from the preceding circles of the Inferno. In a similar way the famous natural arch in the Val Pantena is pointed out as the model for his infernal bridges; and Gargnano, where he once owned property, and where his descendants have since resided, is still popularly referred to as the place where the Purgatorio was written.

The ruling lord of Verona was Can Grande, or Cane the Great, a younger brother of Bartolomeo, and "one of the most notable and magnificent lords that had been known in Italy since the Emperor Frederic II."¹ All his life he had labored unweariedly for the success of the Ghibelline party. From Henry VII. he had received the appointment of Imperial Vicar in upper Italy, and after the Emperor's death had continued to uphold the cause with such success as to win for himself great renown.

¹ Boccaccio, Dec. I. 7.

In 1318 he was chosen Captain-General of the Ghibelline League of Lombardy. His court at Verona was the favorite resort of distinguished exiles, and he prided himself on giving a generous reception to those who had been driven from their country by misfortune. All such guests had their apartments in the palace, their private attendants, and a table equal to his own. The entrances to their apartments were decorated with appropriate designs, — “Triumph for the Warriors; the Sacred Groves of the Muses for the Poets; Mercury for the Artists; Paradise for the Priesthood; and Hope for all the Exiles.”

To this talented and liberal hero Dante now transferred his hopes for the salvation of Italy. Can Grande will be remembered through all time as the friend and patron of Dante. The warm love which this generous young prince inspired in the heart of our saddened and embittered poet, so many years

his senior, is revealed by the letter in which Dante dedicated to his patron the *Paradiso*. Having heard the praises of Cane's magnificence, says the letter, and compared this renown with the actions of moderns, he deemed it to exceed the truth:—

“Not to remain longer in uncertainty, as the Queen of the East came to Jerusalem, and as Pallas to Helicon, I came to Verona, to see with my own eyes. I saw your magnificence,—I saw and shared your benevolence; and if at first I had believed the reports exaggerated, I now found that they were inferior to the facts. And, as from merely hearing of you, I was inclined toward you with a certain subjection of mind, at first sight I became your most devoted friend.”

He speaks of that friendship as his “dearest treasure,” which he earnestly desires to preserve by making some return for the many benefits received:—

“For that reason, after I had long and often looked over my little gifts, I separated them and examined them carefully, seeking that which would be most worthy of you and most agreeable

to you. And I found nothing which was more suitable to your lordship than that sublime canto of the Comedy which is adorned with the title of Paradiso."

This he proposes to dedicate to Can Grande. He also perpetuated his gratitude to the two brothers, Bartolomeo and Cane, by the eulogy in the seventeenth canto of the Paradiso.

Dante was certainly more happily situated in Verona than in any previous resting-place of his long exile, since he had here a permanent home and the society of two of his sons. His residence was probably interrupted by brief visits to the many neighboring castles, towers, and grottos that still cherish the tradition of his presence. To this period belongs Boccaccio's graphic description of the poet's personal appearance, probably gathered from contemporaries:

"Our poet was of middle height, and after reaching mature years he went somewhat stoop-

ing; his gait was grave and sedate, and he was always becomingly dressed in garments suited to his years; his face was long, his nose aquiline, his eyes rather large than small, his jaw heavy, his under lip protruding beyond the upper; his complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and crisp, and his countenance always sad and thoughtful. For this reason it happened one day in Verona—the fame of his work being already known to all, and especially that part of the Comedy which is called the *Inferno*, and himself known to many both men and women—that as he passed before a door where several women were seated, one of them said softly, but not too low to be heard by him and those who were with him: ‘Do you see him who goes to Hell and comes back again when he pleases and brings back news of those who are down below?’ To which another answered innocently: ‘Certainly you speak the truth. See how scorched his beard and how black he is from the heat and smoke!’ When Dante heard this talk behind him, and saw that the women believed what they said, he was pleased and went on his way with a smile, satisfied that they should have this opinion of him.”

CHAPTER XV.

RAVENNA.

DANTE'S presence in Verona as late as January 20, 1320, is proved by his dissertation on "Earth and Water," held on that day in the chapel of St. Helena, before the assembled clergy of Verona; but soon after this date he removed to Ravenna. The causes which led the poet to leave Verona can only be conjectured. The earnest man, "greatly inclined to solitude" and absorbed in his own grave thoughts, may have wearied of the lively court where distinguished exiles and illustrious prisoners of war were mingled, indiscriminately with buffoons, musicians, "actors and parasites of every description." Petrarch, who admits that his fellow-citizen Dante Alighieri

was highly distinguished in the vulgar tongue, adds that he was "in his style and speech a little daring and rather freer than was pleasing to delicate or studious ears, or gratifying to the princes of our times. So that although at first held in much honor by Cane, he afterward by degrees fell out of favor and day by day less pleased that lord." The enthusiastic friendship between men so wholly unlike may have cooled somewhat in time; but there is no evidence of an open rupture with Cane, save a few anecdotes of doubtful authority.

At Ravenna Dante found another generous patron in Guido da Polenta, a nephew of that Francesca da Rimini whose tragic fate he had so sublimely sung. The two years spent here were quiet and peaceful ones, with nothing lacking save that Ravenna was not Florence. The flat sandy marches of Romagna would offer sharp contrast to his memory of the Tuscan hills,

although he may have found some compensation in the wonderful forest of pine-trees with the sea-wind ever murmuring through their branches. "Ravenna stands as it long years has stood," says Dante ; but although the sea had already receded, leaving the city to stagnate in the undrained morasses, it no doubt retained some share of its former glory, and could not have been quite the dead city it has since become. Here he had again the society of his sons and probably of his daughter Beatrice, who remained in Ravenna as a nun after the death of her father. Here too he had leisure not only to continue his sublime cantos, but to exchange Latin eclogues with a younger poet, Giovanni del Virgilio, of Bologna. Giovanni revered the genius of Dante, and urged him to come to Bologna to receive the laurel crown. But he also gently reproved him for writing always in the vulgar tongue, instead of doing himself justice

by composing a Latin poem on some worthy subject, such as the wars of Can Grande or of Ugguccione.

Dante's last earthly journey was an unsuccessful embassy to Venice on behalf of his patron, to establish peaceful relations between Venice and Ravenna.

During all these years of wandering in sorrow and poverty, from city to city, from castle to convent, Dante had been making at the same time that other journey, down through the dark and dreadful circles of infinite mourning, up the sunny slopes of Purgatory into the glories and wonders of Paradise. At the end of the *Vita Nuova* he had recorded a vow to write of Beatrice such things as were never before written of any woman. And he had uttered the prayer that when this task was done, the Lord of Grace might suffer his soul to go to behold the glory of its lady, — namely, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory looketh upon

the face of him who is through all ages blessed. Twenty-five years had passed since this wish was recorded. The three parts of the "Divine Comedy" — *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* — were completed, and Dante had certainly fulfilled his vow. Such things have never been said of any woman before or since as are said of Beatrice in the "Divine Comedy." And no sooner was this life-work finished than his prayer was granted, and

"Heaven unbarred to him her lofty gates
To whom his country hers refused to ope."

Dante died at Ravenna in September, 1321, at the age of fifty-six. He was buried with great honor by Guido da Polenta. In his coffin were placed a broken lyre and that laurel which in life he had refused to receive from any hand save that of Florence, "the mother of little love." His body was borne to the grave by the most distinguished citizens of Ravenna, and Count Guido him-

self delivered a long funeral oration in the house where the poet had lived. The remains were placed in a marble urn, which was intended only for a temporary receptacle until the Count could carry out his intention of honoring his friend with a more worthy monument; but in less than a year Guido was driven from Ravenna to become himself an exile. In 1483 Cardinal Bembo caused a tomb to be built by Pietro Lombardi, containing a portrait of the poet in bas-relief; and in 1602 this was repaired and decorated by the city of Ravenna. In 1780 Cardinal Gonzaga built the present temple, "more neat than solemn," which contains the earlier portrait.

Dante's ashes still rest at Ravenna, "shut, exiled from the ancestral shore;" and although repentant Florence has made many efforts to recover them, Michael Angelo himself offering to build a suitable monument, Ravenna has steadfastly refused to surrender

them. "The dead city," says Lowell, "is tenacious of the dead poet." In 1865 occurred the wonderful coincidence of the discovery and reburial of the poet's bones, since when Ravenna guards more jealously than ever her sacred treasure.

CHAPTER XVI.

VITA NUOVA.

DANTE'S first work was the *Vita Nuova*, the youthful autobiography, or "autopsychology," as his namesake the poet painter has rightly called it. "It is a book which only youth could have produced," adds the same author," and which must chiefly remain sacred to the young, — to each of whom the figure of Beatrice, less lifelike than love-like, will seem the friend of his own heart."¹ The title of the book has been a fruitful subject of discussion. Some prefer to understand it as the *Early Life* or *Young Life* of Dante; and many instances are found where the word *nuovo* ("new") is used in the sense

¹ Dante and His Circle, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

of *giovanile* ("youthful") by the early Italian writers. The contents of the book, however, seem to indicate that the literal interpretation of the title is the correct one, and that when Dante named his little book the "New Life," he meant to designate that new life of love which began with his first meeting with Beatrice.

The subject of the work has been as much discussed as the title. Instead of the sweetest and purest of love-tales, many regard it as an allegory throughout, describing the poet's intellectual life. To them the exquisite love-poems are merely figurative, and the Beatrice who inspires them is not a lovely Florentine maiden, but a purely symbolical creature, the personification of Divine Science. The name Beatrice was chosen, they think, for its significance; and that the daughter of Folco Portinari bore the same name was a coincidence,—nothing more. "Forever would I throw my Dante from

me," exclaims Scartazzini, "if in reading the simple, moving poems of the Vita Nuova I must, with the *hyperidealists*, think only of an abstract personification, and not of a real human being." What Beatrice is to those who find in the Vita Nuova a genuine revelation of the most sacred recesses of a poet's heart, no words can so well describe as those of Professor Norton:—

"The figure of Beatrice, which appears veiled under the allegory, and indistinct in the bright cloud of the mysticism of the 'Divina Commedia,' takes her place on the earth through the Vita Nuova as definitely as Dante himself. She is no allegorized piece of humanity, no impersonification of attributes, but an actual woman,—beautiful, modest, gentle, with companions only less beautiful than herself,—the most delightful figure in the midst of the picturesque life of Florence. She is seen smiling and weeping, walking with maidenly decorum in the street, praying at the church, merry at festivals, mourning at funerals; and her smiles and tears, her gentleness and her reserve, all the sweet qualities of her life, and

the peace of her death, are told of with such tenderness and refinement, such pathetic melancholy, such delicate purity, and such passionate vehemence, that she remains, and will always remain, the loveliest and most womanly woman of the Middle Ages, — at once absolutely real and truly ideal."

The *New Life* is a necessary introduction to the "*Divine Comedy*." The exalted position assigned in the latter work to a simple Florentine maiden can only be understood in the light of this pathetic record of the poet's reverent, far-off worship of the "youngest of the angels." The story of Dante's love for Beatrice, as related in the *New Life*, has been given in an earlier chapter. Every circumstance of that love, every meeting with Beatrice, her smiles, her frowns, her salutation and the denial of it, her tears, and even her mockery, — all furnished "food for poesy."

The sonnets, ballads, and canzoni commemorating his love, Dante collected into

a little book, accompanying them with an elaborate analysis and explanation; and with a connecting narrative, giving an account of the origin and occasion of each poem. The beauty of the poems themselves, the charm of the simple, straightforward narrative in which they are framed, the quaint scholastic analysis which follows each poem, are features which cannot be described; they can only be illustrated by quotation. The sonnet here given is the one immediately preceding that imperfect canzone which was interrupted by the death of Beatrice. Having placed all his beatitude in the words which praise his lady, Dante describes the effect of her loveliness, not only upon himself, but upon others: "I say that this my lady reached such favor that not only was she honored and praised, but through her were many ladies honored and praised. Wherefore I, seeing this, and wishing to manifest it to whoever saw it not, resolved further to say

words in which it should be set forth; and I devised this sonnet, which relateth how her virtue wrought in other ladies:—

“All welfare hath he perfectly beheld
Who amid ladies doth my lady see;
And whoso goeth with her is compelled
Grateful to God for this fair grace to be.
Her beauty of such virtue is indeed,
That ne’er in others doth it envy move;
Rather she makes them like her to proceed,
Clothed on with gentleness and faith and love.
Her sight creates in all humility,
And maketh not herself to please alone,
But each gains honor who to her is nigh.
So gentle in her every act is she,
That she can be recalled to mind by none
Who doth not, in Love’s very sweetness, sigh.

“This sonnet hath three parts. In the first I say among what people this lady appeared most admirable; in the second I say how gracious was her company; in the third I speak of those things which she wrought with power in others. The second beginneth here: ‘And whoso goeth;’ the third here: ‘Her beauty of such virtue.’ This last part

is divided into three. In the first I tell that which she wrought in ladies, namely, as regards themselves; in the second I tell that which she wrought in them in respect to others; and in the third I tell how she wrought, not only in ladies, but in all persons, and how she marvellously wrought, not only in presence, but also in memory. The second begins here: 'Her sight;' the third here: 'So gentle.'"¹

Dante was not wholly free from the superstitions of his time. There is much talk of the mysterious influence of the number nine, and its relation to Beatrice. Dante first met her in his ninth year; his visions occur always at the ninth hour; his lady died on the ninth day of the month; finally, she is herself a nine,—that is, a miracle, whose only root is the marvellous Trinity.

¹ The New Life, Charles Eliot Norton's Translation, p. 66.

The date of the composition is another subject upon which there is wide divergence of opinion. The poems were probably written soon after the events and experiences which they describe, and collected and arranged in a prose setting at a later day. In the *Convito* Dante has divided the life of man into four ages, — adolescence, youth, maturity, and old age. The first period covers twenty-five years. The second extends from man's twenty-sixth year to his forty-sixth. When Dante asserts, then, that the *Vita Nuova* was written at the beginning of his youth, he seems to corroborate Boccaccio's statement that it was written in his twenty-sixth year, "when his tears for the departed Beatrice were not yet dry." The death, in January, 1301, of Guido Cavalcanti, the "first friend," for whom the book was expressly written, fixes the year 1300 as the latest limit for its completion. It may be

definitely assigned to the years between 1292 and 1300.

The literary merit of the prose portion of the work must not be overlooked, it being the first example of an elevated, sustained prose style in Italian literature. While Dante's worshippers can no longer claim for him the honor of having created the Italian tongue, modern Italians are fond of saying that he found the language in its cradle and placed it upon a throne; and even this first essay did much toward ennobling and dignifying the vulgar tongue. The words are the simple, natural expression of the thought. Dante describes the little book as "fervid and passionate;" but the fervor is so childlike, and expressed with such simplicity and directness, as to give to every page the stamp of truthfulness. No one who has come under the influence of this charm will fail to echo the prophecy of its American interpreter that "so long

as there are lovers in the world and so long as lovers are poets, so long will this first and tenderest love-story of modern literature be read with appreciation and responsive sympathy."¹

¹ The New Life, by Charles Eliot Norton, p. 102.

CHAPTER XVII.

IL CONVITO.

“IL CONVITO” (or The Banquet) is Dante’s second work in the vulgar tongue. It resembles the New Life in that it consists of prose and poetry, or of poems with prose commentaries, and is written in Italian instead of Latin. The title may have been borrowed from Plato, but the work has nothing else in common with the *Symposium*. The date of its composition, like everything else concerning Dante, has been the subject of much discussion. The poems were written at an earlier date than the prose treatises, two of them at least having been composed before Dante’s banishment. Internal evidence seems to fix the date of the commentaries between

1306 and 1308. They were probably interrupted by the descent of Henry VII. into Italy and never again resumed.

According to Dante's original plan the Banquet was to consist of fourteen of his canzoni on the subjects of love and virtue. The work is incomplete, containing only three of the canzoni with their commentaries, and an extensive introduction. The commentaries far outweigh the poems, each poem having from one hundred to one hundred and fifty pages of explanation, pages being given to one line, sometimes a whole chapter to a single word. The book is an encyclopædia of the wisdom of Dante's day, — not arranged according to any definite plan, but accidentally, as different lines and words of the poems call out dissertations on different subjects. In the Introduction, or first treatise, Dante states that his object in writing the work was to make the learning of the schools accessible to the un-

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learned. "Blessed are the few," he exclaims, "who sit at the table where the bread of angels is eaten, and miserable those who have food in common with the beasts! . . . I, who do not sit at that blessed table, but fled from the pasture of the vulgar, at the feet of those who do sit there, gather up some of the crumbs that they let fall, and know the miserable life of those whom I have left behind me, through the sweetness that I find in that which I have gathered up little by little, am moved to pity—not forgetting myself—and have reserved something for the miserable which I have already many times shown to their eyes, and have thus awakened in them greater desire. Wherefore, wishing to serve them, I intend to make a general banquet of what I have shown them and of the bread necessary to such a feast, without which the banquet could not be enjoyed by them." The canzoni furnish the meat, the commentary the

bread which is the necessary accompaniment of a feast. He apologizes for making oaten instead of wheaten bread; that is, writing in the vulgar tongue instead of the Latin, which he does for three reasons: First, because it would be unsuitable to make a Latin commentary to an Italian poem; second, that the gift may be useful to the great number of people who are not acquainted with Latin; and third, through love for his native tongue. He devotes to perpetual infamy those perverse Italians who praise the vulgar tongue of other nations and disparage their own.

The second treatise opens with a canzone in praise of that gentle lady of the window, mentioned in the *Vita Nuova*, whose compassion consoled him for the loss of Beatrice. But this second love, if ever a real, human love, has become idealized in the poet's memory, and he now affirms that this lady was none other than the daughter of God, queen

of all, most noble and beautiful Philosophy, of whose sweetness he had tasted so deeply that it banished and destroyed every other thought. In expounding this canzone Dante takes occasion to give his theory of the universe, an account of the different orders of angels, a comparison of the seven planets to the seven sciences of the Trivium and the Quadrivium, and of the three highest heavens to the higher sciences, — metaphysics, moral philosophy, and theology. He also introduces an eloquent dissertation on immortality; for “among all brutalities” he considers that “the most stupid, vile, and harmful which holds that after this life there is no other.” “For if we turn to the writings of philosophers or of other wise authors, all agree in this, that some part of us is perpetual.” “And I so believe and so affirm and so am certain that after this life I shall pass to another and a better life, where lives that glorious lady whom my soul loved.”

The third treatise opens with the song with which Casella delighted the repentant souls at the foot of Purgatory:—

“Love which in my mind to me discourses.”

Dante continues the praises of Philosophy, “whose eyes are her demonstrations and whose sweet smile is her persuasion.” He defines love as the spiritual union of the soul with the loved object, and philosophy as the loving use of wisdom. The different kinds of love and countless other subjects are discussed and elucidated in the fifteen chapters of the treatise.

In the fourth treatise Dante leaves the “sweet rhymes of love” to discourse of the essence of nobility. Frederic of Swabia had defined nobility as the possession of ancient wealth and fine manners. Another defined it as inherited wealth, leaving off the fine manners, “perhaps because he had them not.” Dante disputes both definitions, affirming that virtue alone constitutes

nobility ; that wealth cannot give it or take it away, and that gentle birth will not prevent a man from being base. "The family does not make the individual noble, but the individual ennobles the family." "A vile man descended of worthy ancestors ought to be hunted out by all." The subject gives occasion to defend the rights of the Empire, to outline the history of Rome, — "the very stones of whose streets are worthy of reverence," — and to describe the four ages of man, with the noble qualities that belong to each.

The Convito is indispensable for the understanding of the "Divine Comedy." Indeed, Wegele ventures the assertion that had the Convito been completed, we could without regret dispense with nine tenths of the existing commentaries on the great poem. It is of importance in the history of Italian literature as being the first application of the vulgar tongue to scientific

subjects. Poems and chronicles had been written in Italian; but Dante was the first to attempt to popularize science and theology. The *Convito* has been called the bridge between the *Vita Nuova* and the "*Divine Comedy*." By some writers the three are considered as a Trilogy, as forming one great allegory of human life,—the *New Life* representing the age of childish, innocent faith, the *Banquet* the lapse from that faith and the conflict with doubt, the "*Divine Comedy*" the return of the repentant heart to its first beliefs.

In addition to the poems contained in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convito*, Dante wrote many lyrics. Fraticelli's edition contains seventy-six that are considered genuine. His lyrics alone would have given him the first rank in the literature of his century, had he never written the "*Divine Comedy*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DE MONARCHIA AND OTHER LATIN WORKS.

FROM a historical point of view, the Latin treatise on Monarchy is one of the most important of Dante's minor works. It had the honor of being publicly burned as heretical in 1329, and a zealous Papal legate proposed to submit the author's bones to the same fate. Two hundred years later the book was again declared heretical by so important a body as the Council of Trent. German scholars—to whom the question of the relation between Church and State is an important one—claim that Dante was not only the greatest poet, but one of the greatest statesmen of modern times.

In "Monarchy" Dante's political system is clearly marked out. He proposes to

examine and answer three questions: (1) Is universal monarchy necessary for the welfare of mankind? (2) Does it belong by right to the Roman people? (3) Is the authority of the Empire obtained directly from God, or through the mediation of some servant or representative of God? The work falls naturally into three books. In the first, Dante attempts to prove that monarchy is necessary for the welfare of mankind. For the development of humanity universal peace is essential, and this can be obtained only under a universal prince. Where several things are arranged for one end, one must rule and govern, as the head governs the body. This is the case in families, villages, cities, and kingdoms. The human race is most like God when it is most one; and it is most one when it is wholly united in one body, subject to one prince. As the heavens are governed by one motion and by one mover, so the human race should be governed by one law and by

one ruler. When differences arise between princes of equal rank, there should be one higher than either to arbitrate. Only a universal monarch can be impartial, for he alone, having all things, desires nothing and is free from private ambition. He alone can rule for the good of all. Nations, kingdoms, and States have their own peculiarities, and must be regulated by their own laws; but in those matters which are common to all men they should be ruled by one monarch and subject to one law. The monarch is the director who is to secure peace, justice, and concord to the different nations, leaving each independent as to its internal government. Finally, mankind has only once enjoyed this condition of perfect peace; namely, at the time chosen for the birth of the Saviour, when all the world was united under the reign of Augustus. When we recall the endless turmoil with which the world was filled in Dante's century, and remember that

the figment of the Holy Roman Empire was the only source to which men were as yet accustomed to look for relief, we can understand the meaning of Dante's longing for unity and order. His surroundings were certainly calculated to heighten the value of that peace which he so clearly recognized as the "first blessing of mankind."

The aim of the second book is to prove that the universal monarchy belongs by right to the Roman people,—that is, to the Holy Roman Empire. Right is the will of God, and Dante attempts to show that God willed the rule of the Romans. They were preferred as the noblest people, ennobled by the virtue of their ancestors,—by the nobility of Æneas, the father of the Romans, and by the merits of their greatest citizens. When all nations were striving for the mastery of the earth, the Romans alone prevailed. In the wager of battle they were always successful. Their victory was by the will of

God. In conquering the world they aimed at the welfare of mankind; therefore their aims were in accordance with right. God's will is shown in the miracles worked in behalf of the Roman Empire. Christ, by being born under the Roman Empire, sanctioned its authority. Finally, if the Roman Empire did not exist by right, the sin of Adam was not punished in Christ, for penalty can only be inflicted by a lawful judge; otherwise it is injury. Since all mankind was punished in Christ, he could only be sentenced under one having jurisdiction over all mankind; and if the Roman Empire had not existed by right, Tiberius Cæsar, whose vicar was Pontius Pilate, would not have had jurisdiction over all mankind. "This second book," says Dean Church, "is as startling a piece of mediæval argument as it would be easy to find."

The subject of the third book is the question "between the two great luminaries, —

the Roman Pontiff and the Roman Prince." Does the authority of the Empire depend immediately on God, or on some minister or vicar of God? He answers one by one the arguments current at that time,—the argument from the sun and moon, from different Scripture texts, from the donation of Constantine, and many others. Having proved that the Empire does not depend on the Pope, he must prove that it depends directly from God. Man has two essential parts, body and soul, and partakes of two natures, corruptible and incorruptible. He has therefore a twofold aim in life, the blessedness of this life and the blessedness of the life eternal, and requires two guides, the Pontiff and the Emperor, — the former to lead mankind to eternal life, the latter to preserve peace in "this little plot of earth." Both powers depend directly from God, although in certain things the Roman Prince is subject to the Roman Pontiff.

It was for this third book that the work was condemned as heretical.

The statement that *De Monarchia* was written on the occasion of Henry VII.'s Italian pilgrimage, was for centuries received without question; but Witte energetically disputes it, assigning a much earlier date. Arguing from internal evidence he fixes the date of composition before Dante's banishment. If his theory be the correct one, the reproach that Dante changed his political party through motives of personal revenge falls at once to the ground. Witte's theory is not universally accepted, but his arguments are weighty and convincing.

To Dante belongs the rare distinction of being first in every field he entered. In the *Convito* the Italian tongue was for the first time applied to scientific and philosophical subjects. Monarchy was a subject as yet unexplored; and in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* he again treated a theme not

before attempted by others. "For what fruit can he be said to bear, who should go about to demonstrate again some theorem of Euclid? or when Aristotle has shown us what happiness is, should show it to us once more? or when Cicero has been the apologist of old age, should a second time undertake its defence? Such squandering of labor would only engender weariness and not profit."¹

The theme of *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is the praise of his mother tongue. Its object was to break down the tyranny of the Latin, which was still used by the learned in all writings of importance. The work was written in Latin in order to reach those who considered that grammatical language the only fit vehicle for their thoughts. Dante begins in his usual thorough way by giving the origin of speech and of the different languages. He does not find in any

¹ *De Monarchia*, Lib. I.

of the fourteen dialects of Italy that common tongue which he desires to see used by Italian writers on the subjects of war, love, and righteousness. The national language must be formed by choosing and combining the best elements of all dialects. He desired for his country not only political unity, but the unity of a national language and a national literature. The work was to have consisted of four books, of which we have only two. The second book, which is incomplete, is a treatise on poetry, and on the canzone as its noblest form.

De Vulgari Eloquio was known to Boccaccio and to Villani, but seems to have disappeared from view for two centuries. It was again made known through an Italian translation in 1529, and from its criticisms of the Tuscan idiom roused the ire of the Florentines, who refused to consider it genuine. The remaining Latin work, a thesis on Land and Water, has been men-

tioned in connection with the author's residence in Verona.

Dante's early biographers mention many Latin letters written by him, only eleven of which have come down to us, and doubts exist as to the genuineness of one or two of these. Until the end of the eighteenth century only one, the dedicatory letter to Can Grande, was known in the Latin original, and two in an Italian translation. In 1790 Dionisi published the letter to a Florentine friend in which the proffered pardon is rejected. The discovery and publication of the remaining seven in the first half of the present century we owe to the untiring zeal and perseverance of Professor Witte.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DIVINE COMEDY.

“**H**ERE beginneth the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth but not by morals,” says the poet, giving voice to his resentment against Florence, that “least loving mother,” who had driven him from her walls.

The letter in which the *Paradiso* is dedicated to Can Grande gives Dante’s own account of the meaning and purpose of his great poem. The work is not called a Comedy in the modern sense of the term, but he justifies his choice of a title in this way : —

“It must be known that the word ‘comedy’ comes from κώμη, village, and ᾠδή, song, whence *comedy* means a ‘village song.’ Comedy is in

fact a kind of poetic narration different from all others. In substance it differs from tragedy in this, that tragedy is in its beginning admirable and restful, and at the end, or exit, repulsive and terrible. Comedy has something rough in its beginning, but has a prosperous ending. They differ also in their manner of expression, because one is elevated and sublime, the other soft and humble. . . .

“From this it is clear why the present work is called a comedy; since if we consider the subject thereof, at the beginning it is horrible and fetid, because it is Hell; at the end it is prosperous, desirable, and pleasing, because it is Paradise. If we look at the style of speech, it is remiss and humble, being the vulgar tongue in which even women talk with each other.”

Also in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante says: “In Tragedy we assume the higher style; in Comedy, the lower.”

For the adjective “Divine,” Dante is not responsible. That was added by posterity as a tribute of reverence. For two centuries the poem was known simply as “The

Comedy;" then as "The Comedy of the Divine Poet," until finally the epithet "Divine" was gradually transferred from the poet to the poem; and in the early part of the sixteenth century an edition appeared entitled "*Divina Commedia*," by which title it has since been universally known.

Stripped of its allegory and of its religious and political allusions, the poem is an account of an imaginary journey through the abodes of the dead. Dante was not indeed the first to make use of this subject. He had followed the heroes of Homer and Virgil through the underworld; nor was it the pagans alone who visited the shades of the departed. In Dante's day men's minds were more occupied with the next world than with this. Monks and priests threatened their hearers with the direful torments of the lost; the church walls were covered with realistic paintings on this subject; literature abounded in visions describing the condition

of souls separated from the body. Even the dramatic art had been called in to portray the features of the other world. The stage was built in three stories, with the life of the world represented in the middle, the joys of Paradise above, and the torments of Hell below. A theatrical representation of this kind was given in Florence on the 1st of May, 1304.

“The suburb of San Friano, wishing to invent a new diversion, sent out a proclamation inviting all who wanted to hear news of the other world to assemble on the Kalends of May at the Ponte alla Carraia, and on the banks of the Arno. On the river they arranged boats and rafts of wood, and made the semblance and figure of the Infernal regions, with misshapen men and demons horrible to see, and others which had the appearance of naked souls, and put them to divers torments, with great cries and groans and tumult, horrible and odious to see and to hear. This new game drew many people to see it; and the bridge, which was then of wood, being thronged with people, fell with their weight, so that many

people were drowned and died in the Arno. And thus the comedy was turned into truth, and, as the invitation said, many by death received news of the other world, to the great sorrow and mourning of all the city.”¹

It was not then a new or a startling idea to Dante's contemporaries that he should undertake this grim journey; but he gave it a vividness and a reality which made all previous representations seem shadowy and colorless. He adopted the orthodox teaching as to the state of souls after death,—those who died in sin without repentance were sent into eternal torment, while repentant and believing souls were placed upon the mount of Purgatory, from whence after sufficient penance and purification they ascended to the glories of Paradise. In his system the earth was the motionless centre of the universe, Hell a hollow cavity within the globe, and Purgatory a mountain upon

¹ G. Villani, Libro VIII. Capitolo 70.

its surface. The stars which formed the celestial spheres revolved around the earth in circular and concentric orbits.

The form of the vision was very commonly used at that day, and some of the monkish visions which preceded Dante's have been credited with suggesting to him the idea of the "Divine Comedy." If this be true, we can only agree with the Abate Zanoni that it is a case "where a slight and almost invisible spark served to kindle a vast conflagration." Of all those who saw visions, Dante alone produced a "Divine Comedy." His greatness consisted in using the material that he found about him to create a work of genius.

As to the form of the work, it is built upon the number three. It is divided into three parts, — punishment, expiation, and reward; three personages, — man, represented by Dante; reason, by Virgil; and revelation, by Beatrice. According to Blanc, the

sacredness of the number three, borrowed from the mystery of the Trinity, lies at the bottom of the whole work. Each of the three parts is divided into thirty-three cantos, the three raised to the dignity of ten and united with itself. The first canto of the Inferno is to be regarded only as a prelude or introduction, yet it brings the number up to one hundred, the square of the perfect number. Each part falls naturally into nine divisions, the square of three. Lucifer, at the bottom of the abyss, has three faces,—the horrible antipodes of the Trinity. The name of Christ when used as a rhyme, rhymes only with itself, and rhymes three times; and each of the three parts ends with the word “stars.”¹

Finally, another emblem of the Trinity is found in the *terza rima*, or triple rhyme, in which the work is written,—a form of verse which seems to have been invented

¹ L. G. Blanc. Ersch and Gruber's Encyc., Vol. XXIII.

by Dante. The many attempts to reproduce this triple, interlaced rhyme in an English translation have invariably been failures. The demands of the rhyme require an inversion and obscurity utterly foreign to the straightforwardness and simplicity of the original, and particularly unjust to Dante, of whom the author of the *Ottimo Commento* testifies: "I the writer heard Dante say that never a rhyme led him to say other than he would." Longfellow saw, at the very beginning of his task of translating the "Divine Comedy," that something must be sacrificed; and he wisely decided to abandon the rhyme in order to obtain greater faithfulness to the letter and spirit of Dante.

With the exception of the Bible no book has given rise to so vast a sea of literature as the "Divine Comedy." "When I behold this multitude of readers, interpreters, and imitators," says Ozanam, "Dante seems to

me well avenged. To the exile who had not where to lay his head, who experienced how bitter is the bread of the stranger and how hard it is to ascend and descend the stairways of other men, flock a crowd of the obscure or the illustrious asking the bread of the word; and, in his turn, he will make all generations of men of letters ascend and descend by his stairways,—by the steps of his *Inferno*, his *Purgatorio*, his *Paradiso*.” The “*Divine Comedy*” further resembles the Bible in that students are liable to find their own views reflected therein. Dante himself warns us against limiting the work to one interpretation, since it has many meanings,—the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. What wonder, then, that so many theories are built upon it, and that “to the orthodox Dante is orthodox, and to the heretics a heretic;” that by one class of interpreters the poem is regarded as “a

satire upon mankind fallen into weakness and disgrace under the rule of the Church, — in short, a song of the Empire against the Popes,” — and by another class as the “spiritual history of the poet, of his sin and redemption, as the representative of mankind”? In the letter to Can Grande, which must always be regarded as the Introduction to the “Divine Comedy,” Dante has given a clear account of the subject and purpose of the work: —

“The subject of the whole work taken literally is the state of souls after death, simply considered; for upon this and about this the whole work turns. If we look at the allegorical meaning, the subject is man, in so far as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the rewards and punishments of justice. . . .

“The aim of the whole work is to withdraw those who live in this life from a state of misery, and direct them to a state of happiness.”

The succeeding chapters are intended only to outline the story of the strange pilgrimage

through three worlds, without attempting to touch upon the symbolical or allegorical side of the poem. The symbolism of Dante is an inexhaustible study; one with which innumerable commentators have busied themselves, some to enlighten and some to obscure. For English readers, an invaluable guide to the understanding of the *Commedia* is Miss Rossetti's "Shadow of Dante." To the earnest student, desirous of penetrating to the very heart of the divine poem, Lowell's essay on Dante, in "Among My Books," will always remain the highest and truest inspiration.

CHAPTER XX.

INFERNO.

DANTE places his great vision "midway on the journey of life," — that is, in his thirty-fifth year, half way to the allotted threescore and ten. In the year 1300, then, the year of the Jubilee at Rome, the vision is supposed to begin.

On the eve of Good Friday the poet, having lost the straight way, finds himself wandering in a dark and dismal forest. "Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell what a wild and rough and stubborn wood this was, which in my very thought renews the fear! So bitter is it that scarcely more is death." Having wandered there all night, he comes to the foot of a hill clothed with sunshine. Attempting to climb the hill, he is frightened by a leopard, a lion, and a wolf, and in

his terror rushes back into the dark forest, "where the sun never speaks." Here he is met by Virgil, who has come from his place "among the spirits in suspense" to act as Dante's guide. Beatrice herself had left her seat in Paradise and descended into Limbo, to beg Virgil's aid for him who was her friend "but not the friend of Fortune." But they cannot climb the beautiful mountain, says Virgil. He can only rescue Dante by another path, down through the regions of eternal woe, then up the Mount of Purgatory. There he will resign his charge into the hands of Beatrice, who will lead him through Paradise. Virgil, having so well described the pagan hell, is a fitting guide. Dante hesitates at first, because he is neither Æneas nor Paul, but finally yields to Virgil's guidance.

"Through me the way is to the doleful city;
Through me the way is to eternal pain;
Through me the way among the people lost.

.
All hope abandon, ye who enter in!"

This is the terrible inscription which meets the eyes of Dante when the two poets reach the gates of the lower world.

Passing through the gates they find a gloomy ante-Hell, filled with groans and wailings and confused outcries, where the souls of those who in life did neither good nor evil, had neither praise nor blame, rush through the gloom chasing a whirling banner, and goaded by wasps and hornets. "Not fit for Heaven and spurned by Hell." With them are those angels who remained neutral when there was war in Heaven. Beyond this antechamber lies the "joyless river," — Acheron, — over which the souls of the wicked are carried to the place of eternal torment by the grim boatman Charon, who beats with his oar those that lag behind. Charon at first refuses to receive the living body of Dante, but is persuaded by Virgil.

The Inferno proper is a funnel-shaped abyss reaching from the surface of the earth

to its centre. It is divided into nine concentric circles, in each of which a different crime is punished. As the circles grow smaller, the torment increases in intensity. The abyss was formed by the fall of Lucifer. When this arch-rebel fell from Heaven he struck the Earth with such violence as to open a chasm clear to its centre. The first circle is Limbo, the abode of those who died without baptism,—whether children too young for sin, or the wise and just of antiquity, who like Virgil died before the coming of Christ. Here no lamentations are heard, “but only sighs, which cause the air to tremble.” No form of torture or punishment is here; the only suffering is “hopeless desire.” Dante and Virgil are met by Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, who lead them to a dwelling set apart for sages, philosophers, poets, and heroes. This dwelling is a noble castle surrounded by seven high walls, and circled by a beautiful

river which they cross as if it had been solid land. Passing through the seven gates they come to a beautiful meadow, where, seated upon the "enamelled green," are Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and a host of other noble spirits of antiquity. Their eyes are grave, their voices gentle, their words rare, and no sighs disturb the still air.

At the entrance of the second circle sits Minos, the infernal judge, who examines each lost soul and indicates the circle into which it is to be plunged by the number of times he wraps his tail about him. It is to be borne in mind through all these different forms of punishment, that while the dead have left their bodies upon the earth until the day of judgment, they are provided with the semblance of a body which is recognizable, and is as susceptible to pain as the actual body.

With the second circle the real torments of the lost begin. In a place dark as night

those who in life were governed only by their passions are driven to and fro by the wind, buffeted about and dashed against each other. Now they are driven forward in a body like a flight of birds, now scattered hither and thither, upward and downward, with never any hope of rest. Here, with Cleopatra, Dido, and other famous spirits, are Paolo and Francesca da Rimini, bound together through all eternity. Francesca relates to the poet the sad story which is perhaps more widely known than any other episode of the great poem.

The third circle is a bed of mud and slush, where gluttons lie prostrate under a ceaseless rain of hail and snow and sleet. "Eternal, maledict, and cold and heavy" is this rain. And the gluttons are further tormented by Cerberus, the three-headed dog, who gnaws and tears them as they turn their weary bodies from side to side for rest and shelter.

The fourth circle is guarded by Pluto, the god of riches. Misers and spendthrifts are continually rolling huge stones against each other with such force that they fall back from the clash. One side cries, "Why keep?" the other, "Why throw away?" Not all the gold beneath the moon could buy them a moment's rest.

The fifth circle is the dismal river Styx, widened into a marsh, where the angry, the sullen, and the proud are buried. The angry in an ugly bog add to their own punishment by rending and tearing each other. The sullen are sunk out of sight in a quiet bed of mud, and their presence is only betrayed by the bubbles on the surface caused by their constant muttering. "Sullen were we in the sweet air gladdened by the sun," they sigh; "now are we sullen in this black mire." In the middle of the pool are the arrogant. "How many deem themselves great kings up there," exclaims Virgil,

“who here shall be like unto swine in the mire!”

Across this dismal stream they are rowed by the demon Phlegyas to the sixth circle. This is the fortified city of Dis, with its mosques and towers reddened by the fire eternal. Above the walls a thousand fallen angels, of those “rained down from Heaven,” forbid the entrance of the poets. The three Furies also appear on a burning tower and threaten to bring the Gorgon’s head to turn the pilgrims into stone. But an angel sent from Heaven to open the gate comes sweeping over the water, and at sight of him the rebel angels flee “like frogs before a serpent.” Within the gate the pilgrims find a vast cemetery of red-hot tombs filled with infidels and heretics. The lids of the tombs are partially open, and dreadful shrieks and moans issue from within. But at the resurrection, when these lost souls recover their bodies, every tomb will be sealed up.

So far the sins punished have been rather those of impulse than of malice. In the succeeding circles it is different; and between the sixth circle and the next three a deep chasm yawns, guarded by the Minotaur, the monster of Crete. Dante constantly mingles pagan monsters with scriptural demons.

The seventh circle is for the violent, and is divided into three rings,—for those violent against others, against themselves, and against God. The outer ring is a river of boiling blood, in which stand the violent against others,—tyrants, murderers, all shedders of blood. The depth of the river is proportioned to the crime. Alexander the Great stands immersed to the eyebrows. Others whose crimes are not so black lift their heads above the boiling mass. On the bank stand thousands of Centaurs armed with bows and arrows, and shooting at any who attempt to get out of their

allotted depth. The stream grows constantly shallower until they reach the ford, where only the feet are covered. The Centaur Nessus carries Dante across the ford and sets him down in a tangled thicket.

This dark and pathless forest is the second ring of the seventh circle, and is the place of punishment for suicides, — those violent against themselves. At Virgil's suggestion Dante plucks a branch from one of the trees, and is startled to see drops of brown blood and to hear moans and reproaches from the trunk. "Why dost thou rend me?" cries the torn tree. "We once were men, and now are changed to trees." These gnarled and thorny trees are the spirits of those who died by their own hands. When the spirit of a suicide is released from the body, it drops into this forest like a grain of corn, takes root, and springs into a poisonous tree. Hideous harpies make their nests in its branches and prey upon its leaves, their

shrieks mingling with the groans of the victims. The suicides cannot, like the other lost souls, resume their bodies at the judgment day, because it is not just that one should have again what he has thrown away. Every suicide's body will be hung from a branch of the thorny tree of its own spirit.

This doleful wood, encircled by the boiling blood-river, forms in its turn a "wreath of pain" for the inner ring, — a plain of arid sand on which is falling a slow rain of dilated flakes of fire, "as the snow falls on the Alps when the wind is still." On this scorching plain Dante beheld "many herds of naked souls," with "black and blistered aspect," lying, sitting, or running, all weeping bitterly, and busied in the vain task of brushing off the fiery sparks with their hands. They are the souls of the impious and blasphemers, — the violent against God.

Between the seventh and eighth circles is another chasm, and on the brink leans

Geryon, a winged monster, with the face of a benign and just man and the body of a huge serpent. Dante learns to his terror that they must trust themselves to this terrible monster for the descent into the next circle. Pale with fear, he mounts in front of Virgil, who clasps him in his arms. Slowly wheeling and descending, Geryon carries them down through the darkness and shakes them off on the brink of the eighth circle.

“There is a place in Hell called *Malebolge*, wholly of stone, and of an iron color.” This circle of Malebolge (“evil-pits”) is the home of fraud. Between the precipice, which the poets have just descended, and the well leading to the lowest circle the space is divided into ten concentric gulfs or ditches, where the different forms of fraud are punished. The ditches are separated by walls like the moats of a castle, and rock bridges lead from one wall to another. From these arched

bridges Dante views the sufferings of the fraudulent.

In the first pit deceivers of women are marching in two long files in opposite directions, scourged by horned demons.

The second pit is a cesspool, where flatterers are submerged.

The gray stone walls of the third pit are perforated on the sides and bottom with round holes about the size, Dante thinks, of the baptismal fonts in his "beautiful St. John," the Baptistery of Florence. Simoniacs are plunged in these holes head first, with only their legs visible, the soles of their feet glowing and quivering with fire, like oiled surfaces. Dante's curiosity is so great concerning one whose feet seem to glow with a brighter flame, and who kicks more vigorously than the others, that Virgil carries him down into the pit to interrogate this victim. The spirit proves to be that of Pope Nicholas III., who is waiting impatiently for Boniface VIII., the actual

Pope, to come and take his place, and allow him to drop lower down. Boniface in turn will be relieved by the next Pope, Clement V., who is also a simoniac. Dante takes advantage of the helpless situation of Pope Nicholas to give him a long lecture on the corruption of the Church and the sins of the popes, while Nicholas can only betray his agony by more violent quiverings of his feet.

In the fourth pit sorcerers, false prophets, and fortune-tellers pace slowly by, their bodies so distorted that the face is completely turned around, and their tears fall down their backs.

The fifth pit is a gulf of boiling pitch, in which barrators, bribe-takers, and all dishonest officials are buried out of sight. Winged black demons are on guard, armed with prongs to prevent the victims rising above the bubbling, seething mass. Occasionally some poor soul arches his back like a dol-

phin, or lifts his head like a frog, for one moment's relief from the burning, when the demons pounce upon him and turn him over and over in the pitch with their forks, "as the cook dips the meat in the kettle." The demons showing evil intentions toward Dante, Virgil seizes him in his arms, "as a mother seizes her child in a burning house," and flees to the next pit.

In the sixth moat hypocrites drag themselves about with slow, tired steps, weighed down with cloaks and hoods beautifully gilded on the outside, but lined with lead.

The seventh pit swarms with serpents. Among these the naked spirits of thieves are running, with their hands bound behind them with serpents. They are unceasingly transfixed, and stung, and even change forms with the disgusting reptiles, and crawl away to wreak the same vengeance on others.

Separate jets of flame flit about the eighth pit like glow-worms in a valley. Each flame

conceals a sinner, one who advised or counselled evil. As they sinned with the tongue, the tongue-shaped flame in which each is concealed becomes a symbolic punishment.

If all the maimed and wounded from all the battlefields of the world were gathered together in one place, Dante tells us, the sight would not equal what he saw in the ninth pit. A long procession, headed by Mahomet and his son, marched endlessly round the circle, so torn and mutilated as to be scarcely recognizable. These were the schismatics, the founders of false religions, and those who had bred dissension. Some had lost nose or ears, others had their hands cut off, while others were cleft through the body. As they walked, the wounds closed, but were relentlessly torn open again at every round by a fiend who waited for them at a certain point. "And now," says Dante, "I saw a thing which I should be afraid to relate were it not for the testimony

of a good conscience." A headless trunk came walking toward them carrying its head by the hair like a lantern, and the head looked up at the spectators and said, "Woe is me!" This was Bertrand de Born, who had sown discord between King Henry II. of England and his son; and because he had separated father and son he was forced to bear his head thus severed from his body. Dante continues to stare into this pit of horrors as if fascinated, until Virgil reminds him that he need not try to count the inmates, for the valley measures two-and-twenty miles, and is crowded.

They come now to the tenth and last pit of the eighth circle. If all the hospitals and all the lazar-houses of the Maremma could be emptied in midsummer into one ditch, the misery and loathsomeness would not equal that of this tenth pit, where falsifiers are punished with every form of pestilence. Lying in heaps, or crawling about on the

sand, are alchemists blotched with leprosy, false coiners swollen with dropsy, liars raving with noisome fevers.

Leaving Malebolge, the poets are startled by a blast from a horn, so loud that the loudest clap of thunder would seem faint in comparison. Dante, looking toward the sound, imagines that he sees a number of huge towers, and inquires in amazement, "What town is this?" Upon nearer approach the towers prove to be giants, standing half out of the well that surrounds the last circle. Here is Nimrod, "the mighty hunter," who built the tower of Babel; here stand the Titans who warred against Jove,—Briareus with the hundred hands, and Antæus, the taker of a thousand lions. To the latter Virgil appeals for passage into the next circle. The giant consents; but as he stoops forward to pick them up, Dante shudders, feeling as if the leaning tower of Bologna were about to fall upon him. Antæus

gathers them up in his arms, gently places them in the bottom of the abyss, and raises himself up again "like the mast of a ship."

"It is no jesting enterprise," says Dante, "to sketch the bottom of all the universe."

The ninth circle is a lake of ice so clear and transparent that it resembles a sheet of glass, yet so hard that a mountain falling on it would not crack it. This bed of ice is a fit resting-place for cold-hearted traitors, and here treachery, the darkest type of fraud, is punished. But even in this worst of crimes, as in its punishment, there are degrees. The lake Cocytus (wailing) is divided into four belts,—for traitors against kindred, against country, against friends or guests, and against benefactors. Those who have betrayed and murdered their kindred stand in the ice up to their chins, their teeth chattering, their heads bowed down, and their tears frozen fast to their eyelids. Traitors against their country are buried to

the throat. Those who have betrayed guests or friends lie imbedded in the ice, face upward, denied even the solace of weeping, for the frozen tears fill up the cavity of the eyebrows. Those who have betrayed their benefactors are buried so far beneath the ice that they are barely discernible, "like straws in glass." Among these traitors Dante loses the gentleness and compassion which have characterized him in the earlier circles of the Inferno, and even becomes cruel enough to add to the tortures of the helpless sufferers. Stumbling against the head of one in the first belt, he seizes it by the frozen locks and threatens to strip off every hair unless the victim tell his name. In another belt, having promised, in return for information given, to lift the frozen veil from the eyes of one who longs to weep again, he breaks his promise on the plea that "rudeness to such is courtesy." The most frightful picture in this collection of

horrors is that of one frozen traitor with his teeth fixed in the skull of another, wiping his mouth with the hair when he pauses from his grim repast to relate his story to Dante. This is Count Ugolino, who with his sons was starved to death in the Tower of Famine by the Archbishop Ruggieri. Himself a traitor to his country, Ugolino bears his own punishment, and at the same time takes unceasing revenge on his betrayer by gnawing his skull as a dog gnaws a bone.

In the ninth circle are many who are not yet dead, whose bodies are still in the world, "eating, drinking, sleeping, and wearing clothes." So base was their treachery, that the spirit of each was instantly dropped to its place in the ice, while a demon was sent to inhabit the empty body till death.

The poets have now reached the very centre of the vast abyss where Lucifer stands, submerged to the waist in this sea

of ice. His size is such that Nimrod, whose height was seventy feet, would appear a mere pygmy beside one of these arms. He has one head, but three faces,—a red and a black and a yellow one; “the red face of malice, the black face of ignorance, and the yellow face of envy.” Under each face are two bat-like wings larger than the sails of any ship. The flapping of these wings produces the wind that freezes Cocytus. Tears flow from his six eyes, and in each of his three mouths he crunches a sinner. In the centre mouth the arch-traitor Judas Iscariot is eternally ground between the teeth of Satan and flayed at the same time by his claws; from the other two mouths hang Brutus and Cassius.

Numb with cold and fear, Dante shrinks behind his guide. His terror is increased by learning that the cold and shaggy sides of Satan form their only path out of the

dolorous realm. Dante clasps his arms tightly about Virgil's neck, and the latter begins the dreadful descent. When the thigh is reached, Virgil slowly and painfully turns himself about and begins to ascend. Dante naturally supposes they are returning to the infernal pit, and when he is set down expects to behold once more the cruel mouths. Instead, he sees the legs and feet of Satan towering above him. When Virgil turned himself about, the poets had passed the centre of gravity; the abyss was behind them, and they had now only to climb through a long cavern to the other side of the world, "to rebehold the stars."

Once out of the cavern and under the open sky, the reader draws a long breath of relief. Yet if he has followed Dante from step to step on this weird journey, he has made acquaintance with scenes and persons the memory of which will never leave him. The impression of reality about

Dante's Hell is due not so much to the vividness of the tortures as to the personality of the sufferers. These dead men with whom the poet converses so familiarly, and who recount to him their own crimes, are real people, — popes and cardinals, kings and queens, Guelfs and Ghibellines, and above all Florentines. "Rejoice, O Florence," he exclaims, "for thou art grown so great that over land and sea thou beatest thy wings, and thy name is also spread abroad throughout Hell!"

CHAPTER XXI.

PURGATORIO.

WHEN they issue from the cavern, the poets find themselves on a cone-shaped island in the middle of the sea. This is Purgatory, the Mount of Purification, — the highest mountain in the world. The fall of Lucifer not only made the chasm of the Inferno, but also threw up this cone on the opposite side of the earth. The mountain is divided into terraces corresponding in number to the circles of the Inferno, and at the top lies the "Terrestrial Paradise." On these terraces of Purgatory those who in life repented of their sins are working out their expiation, and hope in time to reach Paradise. They are "content in the fire," because they are not without

hope. Cato is the warder, and, after expressing his surprise that visitors should come in such an unaccustomed way, he directs them to the shore, where Dante shall wash away the stains of the lower world and bind himself with a rush.

It is Easter Sunday when the poets reach the island, and the description of early morning with its "sweet hue of oriental sapphire," the serene aspect of the air, the dew on the grass, and the trembling of the sea, form a restful contrast to the gloomy scenes we have left. And when Virgil dips his hands in the dew and washes from Dante's face the smoke and grime of the pit, we cannot help feeling refreshed with the poet.

Over the sea in front of them comes an angel bringing a boat with a hundred spirits ready to begin the ascent of the mount. Among these spirits Dante recognizes a friend, — Casella the musician, — and runs eagerly to embrace him ; but three times his

arms return to himself empty, having clasped nothing but a vain shadow. The shadow, however, can sing, and delights Dante with one of his own poems, to which the newly-arrived spirits listen eagerly, forgetting to begin the ascent until reproved by Cato, when they scatter like a flock of frightened pigeons.

The base of the mountain and the first winding terrace form a vestibule where tardy penitents wait until permission is given them to enter the circles of Purgatory. The path to the winding terrace is narrow and steep, and Dante is forced to use both hands and feet in clambering up. The sunshine on the mountain has revealed a phenomenon which startles the poet, and is again and again to occasion surprise in the spirits he meets, — namely, that he alone, among them all, casts a shadow. In one place spirits venture forth from the shelter of a rock, one and two at a time, as sheep issue from the fold, to examine

the marvel. Others whisper among themselves and point their fingers at him. When the spirits learn that Dante is really a living man and will return to the world they have left, they crowd about him on every side, begging him to carry back news of them, and to ask the prayers of their friends that the time of penance may be shortened. The poet is obliged to turn this way and that, and to promise every one, before he can free himself from the throng. He meets and talks with so many souls that the day is passed among these tardy penitents. Toward evening they meet the Mantuan poet Sordello, who throws himself at the feet of Virgil, and then, since no step can be taken on the mountain after sundown, offers to conduct them to a pleasant spot where they may pass the night. In a lovely dell filled with flowers of every tint, and with a thousand delicious odors blending into one fragrance, Dante falls asleep, and awakes two

hours after sunrise to find himself alone with Virgil at the gate of Purgatory proper. While he slept, Lucia, the angel of light, had borne him upward, Virgil following. Before them was a gate with three steps,—the first of polished white marble; the second of purplish black stone, calcined, uneven and cracked; and the third of porphyry, “red as blood spirting from a vein.” The three steps signify confession, contrition, and love. On the threshold, on a stone which seemed to be a diamond, an angel was sitting with his feet upon the highest step. In his hand he held a naked sword of such dazzling brightness that no eye could endure the sight. Dante knelt before him, and the angel with the point of his sword inscribed the letter *P*. (*Peccata*) seven times upon the poet’s forehead, to denote the seven deadly sins. Then with the keys received from Saint Peter—one of gold and one of silver—he unlocked the gate. He had been charged

by Saint Peter to err rather in opening than in keeping closed. As the gate grates on its hinges the poets hear a choir of voices singing, "Praise ye the Lord."

Purgatory proper is divided into seven terraces, where are expiated the seven deadly sins. Steps cut out in the rock lead from one terrace to another. Having passed the gate the travellers climb through a fissure in the rock — a "needle's eye" — to the foremost cornice. They find themselves on a desolate plain, its width equalling three times the length of a man's body. The inner wall is a cliff of white marble, on which are sculptured examples of humility. On the pathway underfoot are sculptured examples of pride. On this terrace the sin of pride is expiated. Dante sees coming toward him a long line of figures whom he finds it difficult to recognize as human beings. These are the proud and arrogant, bent over like the figures used to support roofs and ceilings.

Each proud neck is bowed to the dust by the weight of a heavy stone. As they walk they repeat the Lord's Prayer, studying meantime the sculptures under their feet and those on the marble bank at their left. To converse with the friends whom he recognizes, Dante must needs bow his head and walk abreast with them, "like oxen going in a yoke."

When Dante and his guide reach the steps leading to the second cornice, an angel brushes his wing against the brow of the mortal and wipes away the first of the seven letters traced there by the sword. The sin of pride being erased, Dante climbs this ascent much more easily than the last. As they enter the second terrace invisible spirits are heard singing, "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" "Ah me!" exclaims the poet, "how different are these entrances from the Infernal! For one enters here with anthems, and below with wild laments."

On the second ledge the envious are punished. Instead of white marble, the wall and pathway are of dull, livid stone unadorned with sculpture. Leaning against the cliff and against each other, like blind beggars at the church door, sit the souls of the envious clothed in sackcloth, and with their eyes sewed together with fine wire. The tears creep slowly through the closed lids. Invisible spirits fly through the air repeating maxims of love and charity, or thundering forth condemnations of the envious.

At every ascent from one terrace to another stands an angel, who points out the way and erases one of the seven letters from Dante's brow.

In the third circle are the wrathful and angry. The sin which in the *Inferno* was punished with the muddy waters of the river Styx is here expiated in a thick and noisome fog. The gloom of Hell, or of a night bereft of every star, were not so dark

as this black smoke. So dense and rough and bitter is it that Dante is forced to close his eyes and cling to Virgil's shoulder for guidance. The penitents in this circle cannot be seen, but their voices are heard praying to the Lamb of God. One of the spirits, discovering Dante's presence, addresses him ; and, still remaining invisible to each other, they discuss through the fog the vexed problem of free will.

On the fourth cornice lukewarmness is punished. A crowd of spirits come rushing breathlessly by, trying with haste and zeal to atone for their former indifference. They spur each other on with instances of diligence and sloth. The poets find little satisfaction in talking with the hurrying throng who pass them like a whirlwind.

In the fifth circle the sins of avarice and prodigality—love of money and love of money's worth—are coupled together as in the Inferno. Misers and spendthrifts are

lying prone upon the ground, face downward, bound hand and foot, sighing, "My soul cleaves to the dust." As they looked only at earthly things, refusing to lift their eyes above in their lifetime, their years of penance are spent in looking down. By day they eulogize liberality, by night they denounce avarice. As the poets continue on their way the mount is shaken as if by an earthquake, and voices are heard on every hand shouting, "Glory be to God in the highest!" Soon after the shade of the poet Statius overtakes the frightened travellers, and explains that what they thought to be an earthquake was the rejoicing of the mountain at his release. Here are no earthquakes, no storms of any kind, neither fog nor cloud nor frost; but when a soul is sufficiently purified to ascend to Heaven, the whole mountain trembles for joy. Statius accompanies the travellers on their journey, and the converse of the two Latin

poets inspires Dante with a new love for poetry.

In the sixth circle they find a tree filled with tempting fruit just out of reach. The tree is shaped like a fir-tree reversed, tapering downward, so that no one may climb it. A clear stream of water falls upon the leaves from a high rock above. — Crowds of spirits pass swiftly by, with pallid faces, eyes dark and sunken, and so lean that the bones are starting through the skin. The sockets of their eyes look like “rings from which the gems have been dropped.” These emaciated figures are gluttons, — those who have been intemperate in food or drink. Tortured by hunger and thirst, and devoured with longing for the fruit and water in sight, they are condemned to circuit the mountain and continually repass the tree, where the odor of the fruit and the sound of the falling spray enkindles their appetite anew. Some for hunger bite the empty air.

One of these gaunt and hollow-eyed penitents is Pope Martin V., fasting now for the eels smothered in wine wherewith he feasted himself on earth. On the opposite side of the circle is a second tree laden with fruit, and under it stand another multitude of famished, pallid souls, lifting their hands eagerly toward it and crying out like little children. Voices from the branches of the tree answer them with instances of gluttony.

The poets now arrive at the seventh terrace, where the embankment shoots forth flames of fire and the cornice breathes a blast that drives one back. They are obliged to walk one by one along the outer edge of the cornice, with the fire on one side and the precipice on the other. The spirits of carnal sinners are walking through the fire singing examples of purity.

Opposite the eighth ascent the poets are met by an angel, who bids them pass

through the flames, since no one can go farther "without he feel the biting of the fire." Dante, in his terror, becomes like a dead man, recalling the human bodies he has once seen burned, perhaps remembering also that sentence pronounced against him in his native city, "to be burned till dead." Virgil assures him that while the fire may burn, it cannot destroy; if he should remain in it a thousand years, not a hair of his head would be burned. Dante remains stubborn until Virgil exclaims, "Only this wall of fire remains between thee and Beatrice!" Then the poet-lover is conquered and enters the flame. "So raging was the heat," he says, "that I could have cast myself into molten glass to cool me." A voice is heard singing, "Come, ye blessed of my Father!" and as they issue from the flames it adds, "Make haste, the night is coming!"

They begin the last ascent, but before they have climbed far night falls, — the third night

on the Mount of Purgatory, — and the power to move is taken from them. They lie down, each on a separate step, and Dante, gazing at the stars, falls asleep. At daylight they continue the ascent. The summit of the mount is the Terrestrial Paradise forfeited by Eve. Dante finds himself in a cool green forest, the ground dotted with flowers, the trees filled with singing birds. Here he loses the companionship of Virgil, and meets Beatrice in the midst of an Apocalyptic procession. After being reproved by her for his past sins, he is drawn through the river Lethe, which causes forgetfulness of sin. Beatrice then unveils her face, and Dante satisfies his “ten years thirst” by gazing on her beauty. Mysterious visions follow of the future of the Church and the Empire, after which a draught from the river Eunoe completes the purification, and the poet is ready to mount to the stars.

CHAPTER XXII.

PARADISO.

ALL the spirits of the blessed have their seat finally in the great white rose of the tenth Heaven; but in the stars which form the celestial spheres Dante sees different spirits, who appear there only to show to the weak understanding of mortals that there are degrees in bliss as in punishment.

From this time Beatrice, who must now be taken as the symbol of Divine Science, becomes Dante's guide. By simply fixing his eyes upon her face, he is transported from star to star through the nine Heavens. She finds no difficulty in solving the poet's doubts and answering his questions, whether as to the cause of the spots on the moon,

or concerning the graver problems of free-will and the nature of vows. Dante, rising through the air and hearing for the first time the music of the spheres, is surprised at the lightness of his own body. Swifter than the flight of an arrow is their ascent to the first Heaven,—that of the moon,—which they enter, as a sunbeam enters the wave, without disturbing it. In the whiteness of the moon faces appear dim to Dante, as if reflected in clear water. These are the spirits of those who have taken monastic vows and been forced to break them. Among them are Piccarda Donati and the Empress Constance, both of whom were torn from a convent and forced to marry against their will. Constance is the mother of Frederic II., who lies below in the red-hot tomb of the heretics, while her grandson tarries at the base of Purgatory. Questioning Piccarda as to whether the spirits in the lowest sphere of happiness do not long for a higher place,

Dante learns that "everywhere in Heaven is Paradise."

With another arrow-flight the second sphere — the planet Mercury — is reached. Beatrice enters with such joyfulness that the planet itself becomes more luminous. "And if the star changed and smiled," cries Dante, "what became I, who am by nature so changeable!" More than a thousand splendors dart toward them, as fish in a fish-pond crowd toward anything new from without. These spirits are so shrouded in light as to be almost indistinguishable. The Emperor Justinian addresses Dante, and, after giving a history of the Roman Empire, warns the Ghibelline party against France. He informs the poet that this little star is peopled by good spirits who have been active rather for the sake of fame and honor than through love of God. Resuming their interrupted song, Justinian and the other spirits vanish like swiftly-hurrying sparks.

Beatrice, with a smile that might make one happy in the fire, answers Dante's unspoken wish by explaining how Divine Justice is reconciled with the sufferings of Christ. So absorbed is her pupil that he is made aware of their entrance into Venus, the third planet, only by the increased brightness of his lady's face. In the light of Venus the spirits of lovers are seen, like sparks in a flame, circling rapidly about, singing Hosanna. Folco, the troubadour, glows like a ruby struck by the Sun,—for in that high state gladness is shown by effulgence, as here by a smile.

With the swiftness of thought the poet and his guide are transplanted to the fourth Heaven,—the Sun. Here they find themselves surrounded by a wreath of brilliant lights,—the spirits of great theologians and Doctors of Divinity. After whirling three times around the new-comers, the lights pause, and one of them — Saint Thomas Aquinas — makes known to Dante the names

of the twelve who compose the garland. Saint Thomas utters a long eulogy on Saint Francis, the founder of the Franciscans, and ends with a rebuke to his own order, the Dominican, for wandering so far from the Shepherd. When he ceases, the "holy millstone" begins again to revolve, and is surrounded by another circling ring, composed of twelve other lights of the Church. At the next pause, one of the new lights, a Franciscan, eulogizes Saint Dominic, the "Holy Athlete," and condemns the degeneracy of his own order.

The fifth Heaven is the planet Mars, which contains the spirits of martyrs, crusaders, and all others who died fighting for the faith. The spirits appear as lights arranged in the form of a cross, and moving back and forth like motes in a sunbeam. From the cross arises such a melody that the music-loving poet is entranced, though he can distinguish only the words, "Arise

and conquer." The sacred chords, attuned by Heaven's right hand, become silent to give the new-comer an opportunity for speech. Suddenly one of the luminaries glides like a shooting star from the arm of the cross to its foot, to welcome Dante as a kinsman. It is Cacciaguida, his ancestor, who perished in the Crusades. He relates to Dante the ancient greatness of their family, and praises the early days when Florence, within her first circle of walls, abode in quietness and peace, — "when a nobleman walked abroad in a leathern girdle fastened with bone, and his wife left her mirror with unpainted face." Cacciaguida also utters that famous prophecy of his kinsman's banishment from Florence: —

"Thou shalt abandon everything beloved
Most tenderly, and this the arrow is
Which first the bow of banishment shoots forth.
Thou shalt have proof how savoreth of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another's stairs."

The different lights that compose the cross are pointed out to Dante, and each spirit as it is named flashes in its place. Cacciaguida then returns to his own station in the cross, and the hymn of triumph is resumed.

Dante, as usual, fixes his eyes upon his lady's face, and by the paling of her cheek, like a maiden's, when the blush dies away, he perceives that the white planet Jupiter has gathered them to itself. Dazzling spirits are moving about like birds, making the white star resemble silver inlaid with gold. Singing as they go, they arrange themselves in the form of letters,—first D, then I, then L. They thus form successively the thirty-five letters of the sentence, *Diligite justitiam, qui judicatis terram*,—"Love justice, ye who judge the Earth." When the last M is finished the spirits remain stationary. As sparks fly from a burning stick when it is shaken, more than a thousand other spirits arise and gather about

that letter. When each is settled in its place, the form of an eagle is seen. The spirits of which it is formed are the spirits of just rulers. Each spirit glows like a ruby burning with the sun's rays. The glittering bird, although composed of a thousand souls, speaks with one voice, as a single heat rises from many embers. As the eagle is formed of the spirits of the just, it discourses fitly of Divine Justice, which is beyond the understanding of mortals. In the eye are the Emperor Trajan and Ripheus the Trojan. Dante questions how they came there, since they knew not Christ, and is answered that the mysteries of predestination are not known to spirits, much less to mortals.

Dante again fastens his eyes on his lady's face, with his soul in them. She no longer smiles. "If I were to smile," she says, "you would be like Semele, turned to ashes." Her beauty has so increased from

sphere to sphere that mortal eyes can no longer support her ineffable smile. They are now in the planet Saturn, with the spirits of those who devoted themselves to a life of contemplation. Within this crystal planet is a golden-hued stairway reaching out of sight. Multitudes of splendors are descending its steps and flying about it, but all in silence. They sing not here, for the same reason that Beatrice has not smiled. Two of the saints complain of the corruption of the Church and the degeneracy of the religious orders. The other spirits gather about and join in a shout so loud that Dante cannot hear what they say. The whole band disappear like a whirlwind, and Beatrice bids Dante follow them up the ladder. Sooner than you may thrust your finger in the fire and draw it out again, they are in the sign of Gemini, the constellation of the Twins.

This is the eighth Heaven, the region of the fixed stars. Before advancing farther,

Beatrice bids the poet pause and look down once more at all they have left behind them. Looking back through the seven spheres they have passed, he beholds this globe of ours, so small and poor that he can but smile at its appearance. Then his eyes "return to the beauteous eyes." "Behold," exclaims Beatrice, "the hosts and the triumph of Christ!" He sees a sun rising among myriads of lights and enkindling them, as the moon rises among her handmaids the stars. This is the triumph of Christ descending. The sight has made the poet strong enough to sustain the smile of Beatrice, which now shines upon him. "But the theme is too great for mortal shoulders," he adds. He cannot describe that smile. The Virgin Mary is next seen, crowned by a circle of light representing Angelic Love. The melody sung by this circle makes the sweetest earthly music seem like harsh thunder in comparison.

From among the blessed souls of saints and apostles, flaming like comets, the brightest of all, Saint Peter, comes forth at Beatrice's request to examine Dante in points of Faith. Satisfied with his replies, Saint Peter thrice encircles the poet's forehead with his holy light. In the midst of all this splendor and glory the Florentine's thoughts suddenly descend to the poor little globe so recently scorned, as he pictures himself receiving the laurel crown in the old Baptistery of Florence. Dante is next examined by Saint James on Hope and by Saint John on Charity, and holds converse with the spirit of Adam. The light of Saint Peter grows brighter, and changes from white to red, and silence falls upon the heavenly choir as he inveighs against his successors in the Holy See. All Heaven blushes at his words, and an eclipse takes place as when the Redeemer died. The spirits rise like mists in autumn, and are lost

to sight. Again Dante is uplifted by the eyes of Beatrice into the next Heaven.

The ninth Heaven is the *Primum Mobile*, or Crystalline Heaven, which imparts movement to the spheres below it. Dante is allowed to behold the Divine Essence as a point of light so small that the tiniest star would seem a moon if placed beside it, and so intensely brilliant that no eye can bear it. Revolving around this radiant point are nine circles of light, inhabited by the nine orders of angels, the circles nearest the centre revolving most rapidly. The nine choirs of angels gradually vanish from sight, as stars disappear in the full light of the sun, and Dante once more turns his eyes to Beatrice. Her beauty has so increased that none but her Maker has power to enjoy it to the full. The poet adds, sadly, that from the first day he saw her face, up to the present moment, he has never ceased to praise his lady's beauty; but now the theme must be aban-

doned. The artist has reached the limit of his skill.

The tenth and last Heaven is the Empyrean, — the region of pure light. Dante first beholds light in the form of a river flowing between banks of flowers, with living sparks flying back and forth between the flowers and the stream. As his vision grows more exalted, the river becomes a lake of light, and the sparks and the flowers the two courts of Heaven, — saints and angels. The saintly hosts are seated in more than a thousand ranks, rising one above the other in the form of a great white rose. The flying sparkles are the angelic host hovering over the petals of the rose like a swarm of bees. They have radiant faces, wings of gold, and robes whiter than snow. The yellow centre of the rose is a lake of light, whose circumference “would outgird the sun.” In this vast amphitheatre all the spirits of the blessed have their seat, even those who showed themselves for a

time in the lower spheres. "If the barbarians were struck with wonder beholding Rome," says Dante, "think with what amazement I must have been filled who had come from the human to the Divine, from time to eternity, from Florence to a people just and sane!" He turns as usual to interrogate his lady, but she has disappeared. In her place stands the venerable Saint Bernard, whom she has sent as a messenger. "She, where is she?" exclaims the poet. Beatrice has gone to resume her place in the celestial rose, from whence she smiles down upon her lover. At Saint Bernard's bidding, Dante raises his eyes to the highest circle, and beholds the Virgin, the Queen of Heaven, seated upon her throne, with more than a thousand angels hovering near her. At her feet sits Eve, and below her a long line of Hebrew women, dividing the saints of the old dispensation from those of the new. The rose is also divided horizontally,

the circles nearest the centre being occupied by the spirits of children who died in innocence. But innocence alone is not sufficient to win them this seat in Heaven ; it required in the earliest ages the faith of parents, in the second period circumcision, and in the present baptism. Saint Bernard points out the seats of different saints, and then invokes the aid of the Virgin to strengthen Dante's sight that he may behold Deity itself. The prayer is granted, and the poet is permitted to view the Trinity as three circles of light, of three colors, but of one breadth. The second reflects the first, as rainbow reflects rainbow, while the third seems to be a fire breathing equally from both. The poet confesses himself unable either fully to understand or describe the vision, although the sweetness of it is still distilled within his heart.

“Oh, how all speech is feeble and falls short
Of my conceit, and this to what I saw
Is such, 't is not enough to call it little !”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FAME OF DANTE.

DANTE pronounces worldly fame to be nought else than a "breath of wind, which now comes hence and now comes thence, and changes name because it changes quarter." "A thousand years from now, what more fame wilt thou have if thou loose thy flesh from thee when it is old, than if thou hadst died before thou hadst left off thy childish prattle?"¹ Yet although he weighs it thus dispassionately, he shows himself not indifferent to the applause of the world. It is said in the *Inferno*, "He who consumes his life without fame leaves such vestige of himself on earth as smoke in air or foam in water."² In the *Paradiso*

¹ *Purgatorio*, Canto XI. v. 100.

² *Inferno*, Canto XXIV. v. 49.

he still dreams wistfully of contemporary recognition, of a time when Florence shall cover his gray hair with the leaves of the laurel. This recognition from Florence came not in his lifetime nor even at his death. According to Boccaccio, "The obstinate ill-will of his fellow-citizens continued as rigid as ever; no sympathy was shown by any one, no tears were given him by the city, no public solemnity for his funeral,—by which pertinacity it is evident that the Florentines were so destitute of knowledge that among them no distinction was made between a vile cobbler and an exalted poet." But that his works even then were held in high esteem by many is shown by the chronicle of Villani, who interrupts his history to record the death of Dante, "whose noble works are his testimonial and do honor to the city."

In 1350, nearly thirty years after the poet's death, Florence first gave tardy signs

of recognition of her greatest son. The Republic intrusted Boccaccio with the sum of ten golden florins "to be paid to Sister Beatrice, daughter of Dante Alighieri, a nun at the convent of San Stefano dell' Uliva at Ravenna." Twenty-three years later Florence decreed the election of a Professor or Lecturer on the "*Commedia*," at a salary of one hundred gold florins. The choice fell upon Boccaccio, who had always been a worshipper of Dante, having written his biography, and having with his own hand made a copy of the "*Commedia*," which he sent to Petrarch. Boccaccio began his lectures in October, 1373, but had reached only the seventeenth verse of the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno* at the time of his death in 1375. In the same year Benvenuto da Imola delivered lectures on Dante at Bologna. Pisa, Piacenza, Milan, and Venice soon followed the example of Florence and Bologna in establishing chairs of the "*Commedia*."

To make a manuscript copy of such a work as the "Divine Comedy" was no small undertaking, and the dissemination of it must have been slow when it could be accomplished in no other way. With this fact in mind we are prepared to appreciate the permanent hold which Dante had taken on the Italian mind, when Balbo estimates that more copies of it were made in the fourteenth century than of any other work, ancient or modern. The number of manuscript copies still in existence in the libraries of Europe is more than five hundred.

It was the discovery of printing, however, which gave the greatest impetus to the fame of Dante. Between 1472 and 1500 twenty editions appeared in Italy. The sixteenth century produced forty editions of the "Divine Comedy" in Italy, together with various commentaries and translations. With this century the brilliant age of Italian literature was ended. Spanish and other

foreign influence had destroyed all trace of national life and national pride.

Balbo has not overdrawn his picture of the seventeenth century, when "Italy having fallen into a state of abasement and servility, into public and private immorality, with no other policy than deceit, no arms but those of the assassin, no activity but that of violence, and literature having sunk into the same melancholy state of inanity, the worship and study of Dante were almost wholly neglected." Only three editions appeared during the century.

With the eighteenth century the study of Dante somewhat revived, and thirty-four editions were printed. Yet the eighteenth century was not in sympathy with him. Voltaire voiced the opinion of his contemporaries when he said: "The Italians call him Divine; but it is a hidden divinity: few people understand his oracles. He has commentators, which perhaps is one more

reason for his not being understood. His reputation will go on increasing because scarcely anybody reads him. There are a score of verses that one knows by heart, and that suffices to spare the trouble of examining the rest." But after pronouncing the poem fantastic, he adds in justice, "There are verses so happy and so natural that they have not grown old in four hundred years; and they will never grow old. Moreover, a poem which places popes in Hell awakens much attention."

At the beginning of the present century Alfieri affirmed that there were not perhaps thirty people in Italy who had really *read* the "Divine Comedy." Alfieri himself did much to arouse new interest in Dante. But the change from his day to ours has been so radical as to mark a new era.

The nineteenth century has become pre-eminently the Dante century. Witte gave a striking proof of the new interest in the

subject by showing that in the twenty-seven years between 1819 and 1847 as many editions had been printed as in the three hundred and fifty years previous. Eighty editions were brought out in the first half of this century. During the last thirty years the movement has been still more intensified, especially from the powerful impetus given it by the unification of Italy.

The first translation of the "Divine Comedy" was a Latin one, in 1343. It was translated into Spanish in 1428, into French in 1596, and into English in 1785. The first German translation was published in 1809. But although late in the field, Germany has done more to promote Dantesque studies than any other country. Public lectures on Dante have been delivered in her universities for many years by men who have made the subject a life study. In addition to the languages mentioned, the "Divine Comedy" has been translated into Dutch,

Portuguese, Danish, Hungarian, Polish, Roumanian, Armenian, Russian, Modern Greek, and Hebrew.

Great honors have also been paid to Dante's name in a country the very existence of which was unknown to him. The first volume produced in America relating to Dante was Parsons's translation of the first ten cantos of the *Inferno*, published in 1843. Since then the work of Longfellow, Lowell, and Norton has given America high rank in the interpretation of the great Italian.

If Dante be really an abbreviation of *Durante*, — "lasting," or "permanent," — the name was truly a prophetic one. For centuries he has been the inspiration of poets, painters, and sculptors. Of the thousand years which he prophesied would reduce all names to the same oblivion, more than five hundred have passed, and Dante still "burns as a pure star, fixed there in the firmament,

at which the great and the high of all ages kindle themselves." Ruskin pronounces him the central man of all the world, and Carlyle predicts for him ten listening centuries and more. "Almost all other poets have their seasons," says Lowell, "but Dante penetrates to the moral core of those who once fairly come within his sphere, and possesses them wholly. His readers turn students; his students zealots; and what was a taste becomes a religion. The homeless exile finds a home in thousands of grateful hearts, and comes from exile into this peace."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIX HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY.

ON the 14th of May, 1865, all Italy assembled in Florence to do honor to Dante, not only as the Divine poet, but as the patriot as well as the prophet of the Italian unity so recently achieved. Many Italian patriots think, as did Mazzini, that "Dante has done more for Italy, for the glory and for the future of her people, than ten generations of other writers and statesmen."

A hundred thousand people poured into Florence to assist her in celebrating the six hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth. "Among them," says Barlow, "were the representatives of all that Italy delights to call her own, — principals and professors of her learned universities, mayors, syndics,

magistrates, men of science, literature, and art, the most distinguished ; senators, deputies, and citizens of every grade, and of every province and town in the kingdom." It was the first national reunion of united Italy, and Victor Emmanuel, the new king, was glad to give his presence and co-operation. For more than a year the "Giornale del Centenario" had been published, — a journal devoted wholly to Dantesque subjects, containing official information regarding the Dante Festival, expositions of his works, and popular accounts of his life. In the house where the poet was born a Dante exhibit was prepared, including manuscripts, rare editions, and translations of his works borrowed from the libraries of the world.

Three days were given up to public rejoicings, including processions, tournaments, illuminations, musical and theatrical entertainments, banquets, and much eloquent speaking. But the great feature of the *festa*

was the unveiling of Pazzi's statue of Dante in the Piazza of Santa Croce. At the entrance to the Piazza was the following inscription : " Italians, honor the loftiest of poets ! The homage that you render to him atones for six centuries of neglect, and attests to the world that you are a nation." The Piazza itself was turned into a vast amphitheatre, appropriately decorated with thirty-seven designs from the life of Dante, and the portraits of forty of his most distinguished commentators. Here the multitude assembled to witness the unveiling of the statue. Victor Emmanuel, struck with the significance of the scene, exclaimed : " Had it been possible to have brought together a similar assemblage of Italian representatives in the days of Dante, the Piazza of Santa Croce would in a few minutes have become a bloody battle-field." When the covering was removed from the statue and the figure of Dante was revealed in the act of rebuk-

ing Italy for her servitude, her discords and divisions, one shout arose from the vast throng, — “Honor to the loftiest of Poets!” “All this in his honor,” said a spectator, “some five hundred years and more since he passed away, carrying with him to his grave aching thoughts of Fate’s injustice and man’s ingratitude!” The statue bears the laconic and eloquent inscription, — “TO DANTE ALIGHIERI. ITALY, 1865.”

Florence would gladly have opened the festival with the recovery of the poet’s body after an exile of five centuries and a half. A petition was sent to Ravenna begging for the restitution of Dante’s remains, and promising to inscribe upon his Florentine monument a lasting record of the generosity of Ravenna and of the eternal gratitude of Florence. But Ravenna, unwilling to deprive herself of the treasure she had for centuries jealously guarded, refused to grant the prayer of the Municipal Council of

Florence, — “considering that the deposit of the sacred bones of Dante Alighieri in Ravenna could not, through the happily changed destinies of Italy, be regarded as a perpetuation of his exile; and considering that the city of Ravenna, desirous of associating herself in the celebration of the sixth centenary of Dante, would not be prepared rightly to honor the memory of the great Italian if she abandoned to others those sacred ashes which were and are the object of so much veneration and love on the part of her citizens.”

Indeed, had Ravenna been inclined to grant the request of Florence, the attempt to deliver the coveted treasure might have occasioned her some embarrassment. A rumor had long been current that the remains were not resting in the temple built for them. No one could give the origin of the report; but it was unexpectedly confirmed at the very time when Italy was

uniting to honor the poet by observing the six hundredth anniversary of his birth. In connection with this celebration Ravenna decided to make some repairs about the tomb; and while taking down part of the wall of a neighboring chapel the workmen came upon a wooden chest containing human bones, which had been walled up in an unused doorway. On the lid of the chest was a Latin inscription, stating that these were the bones of Dante, placed here by Fra Antonio Santi in 1677. The chest was found to contain all the bones of a human body, with the exception of part of three fingers. The discovery was so remarkable that the public received it with incredulity. "The bones of Beatrice will be turning up next," they said. However, a commission was at once appointed to examine the tomb where Dante had been supposed to rest. The sarcophagus was found to be empty, save a little dust and the three phalanges

which were missing in the newly-found body. The commissioners pronounced the remains discovered to be those of Dante. The monk's object in so effectually hiding them could not be known. He may have thought that Dante's body, as that of a heretic, would not be held sacred; or he may have feared that Florence might succeed, by force or persuasion, in her purpose of removing it. So great was the excitement in Ravenna, that a rumor of one of the commissioners having taken as a relic some of the dust found in the sarcophagus, occasioned a tumult; the mob surrounded his hotel, and it was only with difficulty that he escaped from the city. Evidently the prayers of Florence were never to be granted. The bones were reburied in the mausoleum built for them; and at Ravenna, "on the bleak Adriatic shore, near the blighted pine woods, the dust of Dante sleeps until the Judgment Day."

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